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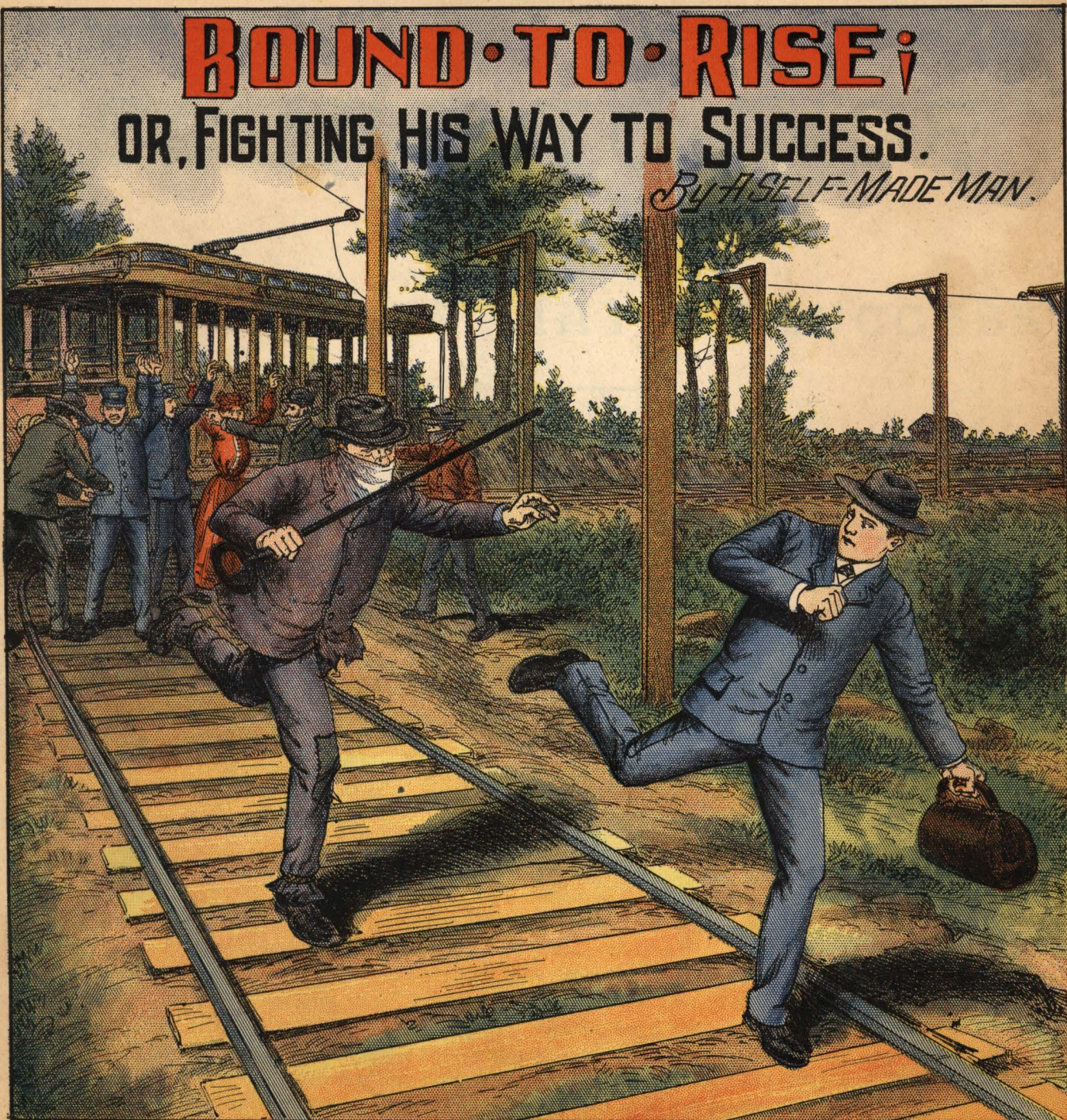
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FAME AND FORTUNE

STORIES OF **WEEKLY** WHO MAKE BOYS MONEY.

BOUND TO RISE; OR, FIGHTING HIS WAY TO SUCCESS.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



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Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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BOUND TO RISE

OR,

FIGHTING HIS WAY TO SUCCESS

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG INVENTOR.

"What are you tinkering at now, Don?" asked Sam Jenkins, who had just climbed into the loft of a small barn, where his chum and schoolmate, Donald Bruce, was busily employed at some inventive creation of his fertile brain.

"This is a working model," replied Don, filing away at a small piece of steel.

"A model of what?"

"A model of a grinding machine."

"A grinding machine, eh? What is it supposed to grind?"

"Rocks."

"Rocks!" exclaimed Sam.

"Exactly. R-o-c-k-s."

"Ho! I thought maybe it was a sausage machine," said Sam, with a grin. "That you put the dogs in here," pointing to a graduated funnel-shaped opening at the top of the model, "and they came out sausages here," pointing to a small oblong chute.

"Well, you're wrong, funny boy. This is a rock-crusher—nothing else; see? A small cartload of any kind of rock is to be dumped in that wide opening when the machine is in motion, and the stuff is sucked down between those revolving drums of wood——"

"Why, wood wouldn't crush anything," said Sam.

"Of course it wouldn't, silly. This is only a toy model.

Those drums are to be made of Harveyized steel, or something like it, in the real machine. The rock is first crushed to a certain size by those drums. Then it passes on to another combination of steel disks, which you can't see, and which are adjustable, and it is crushed into a small size of rock to suit the variety of stone wanted for any purpose and comes out ready for use at this chute. The debris——"

"Daybree is good," chuckled Sam.

"The debris drops through into another compartment and comes out at this chute here."

"Is that all?"

"That's all, and that's enough," replied Don, fitting the piece of steel he had been filing into a certain part of the machine.

"How does it work—by steam?"

"By steam or electric power. A motor can be attached here, or a belt can be put on that wide pulley."

"Great head," said Sam. "Do you expect to make anything out of it?"

"Of course I do. I'm going to have it patented as soon as I have it photographed, sectional drawings made and a description written out."

"How much will it cost you?"

"Something less than a hundred dollars."

"Where do you expect to get the hundred?"

"Don't you worry about that, Sam. If you want a half-interest in this, I'll let you have it cheap, seeing as we are chums."

"What do you call cheap?"

"One thousand dollars."

"I haven't got a thousand cents."

"That's your misfortune, then. You are losing the chance of your life."

"Perhaps I am," responded Sam, incredulously.

"I know you are. That rock-crusher embodies principles not incorporated in any other machine."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I have in my possession the details of every practicable patent issued for rock-crushers."

"Oh, you have? Where did you get them?"

"Through a Washington patent agency."

"And those principles are better than those used in any other machine of a similar kind, I suppose?"

"That's right, or I should only be wasting my time building this thing."

"Say, Don, you've a great head for mechanics. I can't see where you get your ideas."

"Of course you can't, for they come out of my head, and that isn't open for inspection."

"You've been getting up schemes of this kind ever since I first knew you, but I haven't seen you put anything to use yet."

"That's because I've only been experimenting. You can't expect a fellow to turn out something worth while without some preparation, can you?"

"I guess you're right," admitted Sam. "What's that funny-looking model up there on the shelf? You made that some time ago, but you never told me what it was good for."

"That? Oh, that is an unfinished invention of mine."

"What is it intended for?"

"I'll let you know if I ever complete it. I don't like to specify the nature of my ideas until they have assumed some definite shape."

"Well, the rock-crusher is all right, at any rate. It looks to me as if you'd make a success out of it."

"I hope to, Sam. I've spent a good deal of time and thought over it. In my opinion, this machine is going to fill a long-felt want. By regulating the central disks it will turn out stones of different sizes at a comparatively small cost per ton. It will produce stone suitable for making roadways, railroad embankments, filling in stone piers, and many other purposes, as well as for mixing with cement for the construction of solid foundations for skyscrapers and very solidly built buildings everywhere. One of these machines could be erected in a city like New York, where a great deal of rock has to be blasted out to make building sites or street openings. Instead of carting the rough stone away, it could be dumped into the machine on the spot and be turned into good, marketable stone of one or various sizes and sold at a good profit."

"Your head is full of ideas," said Sam, admiringly.

"That's the advantage of having such a head," laughed Don. "One can always make more money working with his head, if it amounts to anything, than with his hands."

"Well, if you're through tinkering for the present, I wish

you'd come along with me to the ball field. Joe and Jack Handy sent me over to fetch you."

"All right," acquiesced Don. "All work and no play makes a chap a dull boy, so I'll take a rest until after dinner."

Thus speaking, he put on his hat and jacket and the pair left the barn and started for the town ball ground.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOLD-UP.

Everybody in the town of Oakland, where Don Bruce lived, said he was a clever boy, and what everybody says is generally true.

He was as bright as a new pin, and stood at the head of his class in the High School.

He lived with his widowed mother and an older sister in a neat cottage on the suburbs of the town.

The Bruces were not very well off, but they managed to make ends meet through the exertions of Edith Bruce, who was a skilled dressmaker, and was constantly employed by the best people in town, aided by a quarterly pension which Mrs. Bruce received from the government, for her husband had served through the greater part of the Civil War and was wounded at the battle of Fisher's Creek, in the Shenandoah Valley.

The only drawback was a mortgage of twelve hundred dollars held by Squire Dornton on the cottage, which was nearly due, but which the Squire had practically given them to understand that he meant to renew, as the security was good and they had never failed to pay the half-yearly interest of thirty dollars when it became due.

When Don graduated from the grammar school he wanted to take a position in a store in order to lighten the family load, but to this neither his mother nor sister would listen, as they expected great things of the promising son and brother, and they were willing to make any sacrifice that he might be properly equipped for the battle of life.

So Don was persuaded to enter the High School, where, so far, he had conducted himself with great credit both to himself and his instructors.

Don, as the reader has had some evidence, was of an inventive turn of mind.

His active brain teemed with ideas, some of which he was able, through great persistence, to reduce to a practical shape.

His ambition was to accomplish something that would point the way to fortune.

He had visions of a grand house, in which his mother and sister were to live some day, and a goodly bank account to support the same in a style befitting its prominence.

But he was not what you might call a castle-builder—that is, he did not waste his precious moments dreaming over what he coveted, but was always endeavoring to find

the way that would accomplish the purposes he had in view.

He had a small workshop in the barn behind the house, and here he put in such time as he could spare.

The shelves were ornamented with a dozen models of different schemes, of which the salt-making machine and his latest production, the stone-crusher, were about all that promised results.

The day following the conversation narrated in the previous chapter was Saturday, and it had been arranged, as it was the first of July, the date on which the semi-annual interest on the mortgage was due, that Don should carry the thirty dollars to the home of Squire Dalton.

The squire had written Mrs. Bruce a note asking her to do this, as he was confined to the house with a sore leg and could not call for the money himself.

Accordingly, after dinner, which was always eaten by the Bruces in the middle of the day, Mrs. Bruce counted out the amount from her small savings, put it into an envelope addressed to Squire Dalton, and then placed it inside a small satchel and handed the same to Don.

Into the hand-bag she had also placed a small bundle containing an embroidered silk table scarf, which Edith had made for a customer living not far from the home of Squire Dalton, and which Don was expected to deliver.

Thus equipped, Don left the house, walked to the trolley line, which passed close to his destination, two miles outside of Oakland, hailed a car and was presently on his way.

It was a cloudy afternoon, though there were no positive indications that it was likely to rain.

There were several passengers in the car, one of whom was a very pretty but plainly attired girl of perhaps fifteen.

As the car proceeded on its way toward the next town the passengers dropped off, one by one, until only the girl and Don were left.

About a mile and a half outside of Oakland the road took a wide sweep to the left, and when the trolley car reached the middle of this curve something unexpected happened.

Four rough-looking men, with their faces partially covered with handkerchiefs, to prevent identification, sprang from behind a clump of bushes and boarded the car—two on the front platform and two on the rear.

One of them seized the rope and jerked the trolley clear of the wire, thereby cutting off the power and presently bringing the car to a standstill.

Drawing revolvers, the rascals compelled the motorman, conductor, Don and the frightened girl to alight and line up on the track ahead.

It was a clear case of hold-up—a most unfortunate predicament for Don to find himself in at that moment, for the loss of the thirty dollars interest money he carried in the satchel would be a very serious matter for the Bruce family.

While three of the ruffians threatened the victims with two revolvers and a switch-bar, which one of them had picked up somewhere, the fourth began operations on the

person of the conductor, emptying his pockets of a few bills and loose change.

Don knew it would be his turn next.

The situation made him desperate.

On the spur of the moment he broke away and dashed down the track.

With a fierce imprecation the man with the switch-bar rushed after him.

Don, however, was a good runner, and the rascal with the switch-bar was no match for him in that respect.

He called on the boy to stop, swore roundly, and threatened him with all kinds of vengeance if he did not.

But Don was not a fool.

He had thirty dollars and a valuable piece of silk goods to save, and he was not going to let the satchel fall into the rascal's hands if he could help it, and he thought he could.

Possibly it was not a chivalric act on his part to desert a pretty girl in trouble, but he argued that it was clearly up to the motorman and the conductor to protect her, as she was, to a certain extent, in their charge.

At any rate, it was a most important matter to save the contents of the satchel, for he was responsible for the safe delivery of both the money and the scarf at their destinations.

So he ran down the track as fast as he could, and when the ruffian in pursuit saw that he could not overtake the boy he threw the switch-bar after him.

Fortunately it fell short, and Don rapidly increased his distance.

Had the man thrown the bar at first, when Don was within easy reach, there might have been a different tale to tell.

As it was, the boy outfooted his pursuer, and the latter gave up the race and returned to the stalled car.

Fortunately for Don, he was quick-witted as well as fleet.

When he saw the man go back it occurred to him that the rascals might continue the chase in the car, hoping to catch him off his guard.

That is just what they did do, but when they caught sight of him scudding across the meadows they gave him up for a bad job and, alighting, permitted the car to proceed on its way.

Don, of course, had to walk the rest of the way to Squire Dalton's home.

However, that did not matter much.

He had outwitted the tramps and was in high glee over that fact.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE VACANT HOUSE.

Don did not return to the road along which the trolley ran, but made a detour across the fields, which, though not as pleasant walking, had the advantage of being a short cut to his destination.

Short cuts, however, sometimes have their disadvantages, and so it was with Don in this case.

As he approached an old, deserted house in the center of one of the fields he saw some boards lying upon the ground in his path.

Their presence there had no significance for him, and he did not even take the trouble to avoid them, but stepped right upon them.

It happened that those boards had been placed there to cover a dry well, not a very deep one, and that time and moisture had sapped their strength.

Consequently the moment Don's entire weight rested on them they yielded with a suddenness that allowed him no time to save himself.

Down he shot into the depths, like a stage demon through a trap, and he disappeared from sight in less time than one could whisper "Jack Robinson."

The bottom of the well was partially filled in with loose earth, and this broke his fall.

Nevertheless he got a bad shaking up and a nasty blow on the head from the brick side of the well.

It was several minutes before he began to realize his position.

The shock he had sustained made him sick and dizzy, and he leaned back against the wall of the well to recover himself.

As soon as he felt better, and was satisfied he had sustained no material injury, he looked up and saw that he was about twelve feet below the level of the field.

How he was going to escape from his unfortunate predicament seemed at first sight to be something of a problem.

A more searching examination of the sides of the well, however, revealed certain inequalities, as well as missing bricks here and there, that suggested a way to get out.

When Don had thoroughly recovered himself he took the handle of his bag between his teeth and began to work his way upward toward freedom.

He found it a slow and difficult trip, and one that took all the dogged persistence of his nature to accomplish.

At length he got his hands on the outside rim of the brickwork, and had raised his head into the outer air, when he saw four persons crossing the field toward him.

A hurried glance showed him that they were the four trampish-looking rascals who had held up the car.

Don immediately ducked his head out of sight, and then asked himself whether he had not better drop to the bottom of the well again in order to avoid the possibility of discovery.

But the trouble he had had in climbing up induced him to remain where he was.

"They may pass close to this old well, but it's hardly likely that they will take the trouble to look into it," he figured.

So he remained clinging to the brickwork like some huge spider in his hiding-place.

Presently he heard the voices of the ruffians in loud and animated discourse as they drew near.

As they passed within a few feet of his position he was surprised to hear the name of Squire Dalton mentioned by one of the men.

Don raised his head above the hole and looked after them. He saw that they were making for the deserted frame building.

"I wouldn't be surprised if that is where those rascals hang out while in this neighborhood," he said to himself. "It would give me a good deal of satisfaction to put the constables on to them. If I could only be sure that this is their rendezvous, the police might be able to nab them right off the reel. Now, I wonder why they were talking about Squire Dalton? Can it be that they are figuring on robbing his house? I'd give something to find out. There they go right into that house. I think I owe a duty to the community to try and discover if they are up to some other piece of villainy and then to put a spoke in their operations. Still, I mustn't be rash. It wouldn't do for me to lose what's in this bag. First of all I must get out of this well."

That feat was not difficult now, as Don had a good grip on the top of the brickwork, so by the exercise of his muscles he pulled himself out of the well.

He found that by walking over to a stone wall that formed the boundary of that particular field he could approach close to the rear of the house without much chance of detection, even if one of the ruffians happened to be on the watch.

Most boys in Don's position would have preferred to have given those rascals a wide berth, particularly after what had occurred on the trolley road, but Don was of an adventurous disposition and plucky to a degree.

He had a strong desire to assist in bringing about their arrest, and with that purpose in view he was eager to get a line on their movements, and the chance to do this might not occur again.

With great caution he left the shelter of the fence and walked up to a one-story addition to the building, which, from its projecting chimney, he judged had been used by the former residents as a kitchen.

There was a closed door but no window looking in his direction.

The window was on the side opposite the chimney.

As he had seen the four men enter through the door, he did not consider it prudent to follow their example, lest he run afoul of them in that room.

So he looked around for some other way to get into the house without attracting attention.

He saw a water butt standing against the blank wall under the chimney.

It was covered, and Don calculated that he could easily scramble to the roof of the addition and get into the main part of the building through one of the windows overlooking the kitchen roof.

Before attempting this feat he stowed his satchel away under the water butt.

"There, now. I won't be handicapped by that thing, and if the rascals should nab me by any chance the bag and its contents will be safe from their clutches.

Don took off his shoes, and, sticking one in each of his side pockets, he clambered down upon the water butt and thence to the roof of the kitchen.

Stepping gingerly over the shingles, he reached the nearest window and tried it.

It readily yielded to his touch, and softly raising the sash he climbed through into a vacant chamber.

Leaving the window open, to facilitate his retreat, if necessary, he tiptoed across the dusty floor and opened a door communicating with the upper landing.

Hearing no sound, Don investigated the other rooms on that floor, and found them just as empty and just as dirty as the one he had entered first.

"It is evident that the men are downstairs, perhaps in the kitchen. There are no signs to show that they have ever been up here. So I'll have to go down."

He descended the staircase with great caution, for it had a tendency to creak underneath his weight, and stood listening in the hall below.

Still there was not a sound to indicate where the four rascals were.

Don carefully looked at the fastening of the front door, and saw that it was simply locked, with the key gone.

A door opened on to the hallway from either side.

Don listened at both keyholes, and, hearing nothing, he opened in turn each of the doors and found the rooms to be in a similar state to those upstairs.

"I guess those chaps are in the kitchen, all right. I wonder if I'll be able to get within earshot of them?"

He walked to the end of the hall and tried the door which opened off of it.

Don opened it with all due caution, and found himself looking into another vacant room, evidently once used as a dining-room.

"Nothing doing yet," he muttered.

He crossed the apartment to a door that he believed opened on to the kitchen.

"They're in there, if they haven't left the house while I've been making a tour of the place," he said.

Still, he could hear no sound from the men, though he listened intently at the keyhole.

Finally he mustered up resolution enough to turn the handle of the door and open it an inch or two.

Still no sound or sign of the ruffians.

"Can they have left the house so soon?" Don asked himself, as he continued to push the door open until he was able to see that the room was as empty and dusty as any of the others.

It was the kitchen addition, the boy saw, and he stood irresolutely on the threshold and scratched his head.

"I've been through every room in the house, and there isn't a single thing to show that these men hang out here. Now, what puzzles me is, why did they come here, and where have they gone?"

He stepped into the kitchen and looked around.

There were two other doors beside the one opening out on the yard, and through which he had seen the men enter.

Trying the one on the left, he saw it opened into a closet.

Then he opened the other and found that it communicated with a pair of steps leading to the cellar.

As he stood looking down, he heard, for the first time since entering the house, the voices of men in conversation.

"Ah!" exclaimed Don. "They are down there."

CHAPTER IV.

DON MAKES A DISCOVERY AND PLAYS A SMART TRICK.

The conversation below was only desultory, and there were other sounds that showed the rascals were doing something in the cellar.

Don was curious to find out what they were up to, and yet he was afraid to go down, lest he invite immediate discovery.

Judging by the sounds he heard, the men were at the far end of the cellar, and this fact gave Don courage after a while.

He closed the door behind him to shut off the light, and then placed his stocking feet on the first step, then on the one lower, and then on the third.

By stooping down he was able to look into the cellar.

A couple of candles were burning in the far corner, and the four men were grouped near them.

One was digging with a piece of shingle, two were kneeling down and a third standing up, all watching the excavation the digger was making.

"What can they be after?" thought Don, with no little curiosity.

He advanced another step with more confidence, for the stairs were shrouded in darkness, and the ruffians were deeply interested in the work they had in hand.

Finally he reached the floor of the cellar and crept forward to a big empty box, behind which he hid.

"I don't believe this is the right corner," he heard one of the men say.

"This is the left-hand corner, isn't it?" replied the man with the shingle, pausing and looking up.

"Of course it is, but there doesn't seem to be anything here."

"Flash Dick said it was the left-hand corner, didn't he?"

"Well, he might have made a mistake. He was partly off his chump, anyway."

"As he buried the bag, he ought to know."

"That's right," interjected one of the others. "Dig deeper, Burley."

There was nothing more said for a time, during which the man with the shingle worked away industriously, throwing the dirt behind him.

Then the man who had asserted that the digging was being done at the wrong spot chipped in once more.

"You're down four feet now and there ain't no sign of the bag," he said impatiently. "I'll bet it's the other corner."

"Maybe he didn't bury the stuff here, after all," said one of the men.

"He must have," said the man who wanted operations transferred to the other corner. "Flash Dick wouldn't have said he did if he didn't."

"Well, let's try the other corner," said the man. "The stuff is well worth huntin' for, if we spend a week doin' it. It's all solid silver, ain't it?"

"That's what it is," said the other man.

"It ought to make a good haul for us. We kin melt it up and sell it for coin metal. Squire Dalton will never see the stuff ag'in if we get our hands on it, I warrant that," with a rough laugh.

"He's offered a reward of five hundred dollars and no questions asked for its return," said the man addressed as Burley. "That shows it's the real stuff. Flash Dick was a clever duck to get away with it without diskivery."

"There wasn't no cleverer fellow in the business," was the reply. "Be the grass green over his grave. He was a square pal, too. None better."

This conversation threw a bit of light on the matter, for Don remembered reading in the Oakland Times, three weeks since, that Squire Dalton's house had been burglarized one night and a considerable quantity of silverware stolen from the premises. Among other things was a solid silver service that the squire had presented his wife on the occasion of the silver wedding anniversary.

The burglar had left no clue by which the police could trace him, and the detective called into the case had failed to find any trace of the goods, although the pawnbrokers' shops of the neighboring cities had been visited and duly warned of the exact nature of the plunder.

Don now caught on to the fact that the burglar had buried the swag in the cellar of this deserted house, and, being unable to return for it, had told of its whereabouts to one of his friends, who appeared to be one of those four rascals, and he had enlisted the others in the project of recovering the stolen plate for their mutual advantage.

The digging man discontinued in the left-hand corner and begun anew in the opposite corner, which brought the fellows closer to the concealed boy.

As their faces were no longer disguised by the handkerchiefs which they had worn when they held up the trolley car, Don got a good view of their features.

They were certainly a hard-looking lot, and seemed capable of committing any crime in the calendar, even murder.

"I wouldn't like them to catch me down here," breathed Don. "I'm afraid it might go hard with me."

He half wished that he had not begun the investigation which had led him to the cellar, but it was too late now to worry over what he had done.

Apparently he must remain where he was until the rascals took their departure.

He was not particularly averse to this, as he was interested in the search the men were making.

If they found the silverware in question, Don thought he might be able to set the police on their track, so that the plunder could be recovered, in which event, he hoped, he might come in for a part of the reward the squire had offered.

Anything in the shape of money appealed to Don, as it was a somewhat scarce article at his home.

The man who suggested the change of corners now undertook to do the digging.

The work proceeded slowly, for the shingle broke in half, and they did not have a second one.

Their conversation was not particularly interesting to the boy, as it was interspersed with oaths and expressions unintelligible to anybody but crooks like themselves.

Half an hour passed away in this manner, and then the digger uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"I believe I've struck the bag," he said.

One of his companions grabbed a candle and held it down into the hole.

The digger scraped some of the earth away.

"It's the bag, all right," he said.

Two of the men now started in to help matters along with their hands, and the dirt flew fast.

At length they uncovered the object of their search sufficiently to enable them to lift it out of the hole.

"Now, let's have a look at the stuff," said Burley, tearing away the bit of string that held the mouth of the sack together.

Both candles were held so as to throw as much light into the bag as possible.

"It's the real stuff—pure silver," one exclaimed, thrusting in his arm and drawing out a glistening water pitcher. "That must have cost a hundred cases."

Burley fished out a silver tray, with a monogram cut on the bottom.

"We're in luck," he said. "The bag is full of all kinds of silver stuff. Flash Dick knew what to put his flippers on. Not a plated article in the whole outfit."

The articles inspected were returned to the bag and the mouth retied.

"Now, the question is, how are we goin' to carry this bag away without any one gettin' on to us?" said Burley.

"We must wait till dark," said the man who had been doing the digging.

"It won't be dark for several hours," replied Burley, getting out his pipe, filling it with tobacco and lighting it at one of the candles. "I'm a bit peckish, seein' as I hain't had nothin' to eat since mornin', and not much then. If we are goin' to remain here three or four mortal hours I reckon one of us ought to go foragin' for victuals."

This suggestion struck a responsive chord in the minds of the others, and after some argument it was decided that

two of them should go on to Bridgeton, a mile away, and purchase a small stock of provisions.

A coin was tossed up to decide who were to go, and, the result being announced, the pair took their departure for the town in question.

Burley and the man who had done the successful digging remained in the cellar.

Don began to realize that he was fated to remain where he was until some time after dark, and the prospect was not encouraging.

The two men smoked and talked for half an hour, and then Burley said he was going upstairs for a change.

The other decided to accompany him, and in a few minutes Don was left alone.

"Thank goodness, they're gone," he said; "but I suppose they'll be back again presently."

He got out from behind the box and stretched his cramped limbs.

The candles still burned where Burley had placed them on top of a box, and the bag of plunder stolen from Squire Dalton's home lay on the edge of the hole.

Don drew on his shoes and made a hasty survey of the cellar.

He found there was another exit from the place besides the stairs leading up to the kitchen.

A short flight of steps connected with a pair of common cellar flaps.

Striking a match, Don saw that the double covers were held by a hasp secured by a small spike.

To remove the spike, open one of the flaps and escape from the cellar seemed a simple matter for Don, provided he was not seen from one of the windows by the rascals above, whom he could hear walking about the rooms.

He took out the spike and tried the flap to see how it would work.

It creaked a bit on its hinges, but otherwise there was no trouble.

"Now, if I only could get away with the sack of silverware; but of course I couldn't. Before I could carry that very far those rascals would miss it and be after me."

Then his eye lighted on the water butt.

"By George! If I could get it out of the cellar unobserved I'd drop it into that cask. I'll bet they'd never think of looking there for it."

It struck Don as being such a brilliant idea that he yearned to put it into practice.

He returned to the cellar floor and listened.

He no longer heard the men on the floor above.

Were they standing by a window, or had they gone upstairs?

The fear that they might come upon his unawares made him nervous.

Suddenly as his eyes fell upon a coil of rope an idea struck him.

He seized the rope and one of the candles and ran up the cellar stairs.

One end of the rope he made fast to the knob of the

door opening on the kitchen; the other end, after drawing the rope taut, he made fast to the rail near the top step of the stairway.

It was impossible now for the two rascals to regain the cellar that way without breaking down the door.

That would give Don a little chance to act.

So he grabbed the bag of silverware, which he found very heavy, and dragged it across the cellar floor to the other stairway.

Then he dragged it up the stairway into the open air.

Removing the cover of the water butt, which he then used as a support, he raised the bag up, grabbed it in his arms and dumped it over into the cask, where it fell with a splash into the dirty water and disappeared.

"I guess it will be safe enough there," said Don, complacently, as he put the cover on again.

At that moment he heard a noise in the kitchen.

"I'll bet they're trying to get that cellar door open," he chuckled. "It must puzzle them greatly to account for what is holding it shut."

He softly shut the cellar flap, reached under the water butt for his satchel, and slipping around to the front of the building started for the nearby trolley road as fast as his legs could carry him.

CHAPTER V.

DON RESTORES THE SQUIRE'S PROPERTY AND RECEIVES THE REWARD.

Don soon reached the road and, turning in the direction of Bridgeton, lost no time in covering the distance which intervened between him and the home of Squire Dalton.

Fifteen minutes later he rang the front-door bell at the Dalton house, quite a pretentious dwelling, setting back some fifty feet from the street.

He was admitted and ushered at once into the presence of the well-to-do owner of the house, who was sitting in his library with a newspaper in his hands, and a bandaged foot resting on a low stool.

"Good afternoon, Bruce," said the squire, pleasantly, motioning the boy to a seat.

"Good afternoon, Squire Dalton," replied the lad, placing the satchel on his lap and opening it. "I have brought you the thirty dollars interest money."

As the squire had been expecting that Don might call that afternoon, he had the receipt in his pocketbook ready to exchange for the money.

"Ah, indeed, your mother is always prompt. I wish I could say the same of all with whom I have money dealings."

Don passed over the money and received the receipt.

"I suppose you will renew the mortgage, Squire Dalton," said Don, "as mother is not able to pay the principal."

"It would be an unnecessary expense and bother to go to the trouble of making out a new mortgage, when the old one will answer as well. Tell your mother that she need be under no anxiety about the matter. The loan can remain indefinitely, as long as the interest is paid with her accustomed regularity."

"But, sir, if you should change your mind you could call the loan in any time, and if we were unable to pay you could foreclose."

"That would necessarily remain my privilege under certain limitations, but I have no immediate intention of exercising it. I prefer to have the money invested as it is. So long as the interest is paid with reasonable promptness I am perfectly satisfied not to make any change."

As Squire Dalton was regarded as a perfectly square man in business matters, Don had nothing more to say on that subject.

He had something else to say, however, that rather surprised the squire.

"I believe your house was robbed a few weeks ago, Squire Dalton?" he said as an introduction to what was to come.

"Yes. I lost quite a lot of valuable silverware, of which I have been unable to get any trace, although I have a detective still working on the case."

"I think you offered a reward of five hundred dollars for its recovery?"

"I did, but I am afraid no one will earn it."

"Would you have any objection to my earning it, Squire Dalton?" asked Don.

"You!" exclaimed the squire, looking hard at the boy. "It can't be that you have found any clue to its whereabouts?"

"Yes, sir. I may say that I had my hands on your property half an hour ago."

"I don't quite understand you."

"I think when you have heard my story, sir, you will admit that there is a good chance of you getting your silver back through me."

"I will hear you," said the squire, in a tone which showed a trace of some excitement.

Whereupon Don recited the adventures he had gone through since leaving his mother's cottage that afternoon with the thirty dollars to pay the semi-annual interest on the mortgage.

His statement that the stolen silverware had been buried by the burglar in the cellar of the deserted house half a mile back near the trolley road astonished the squire.

"And there it has evidently remained until this afternoon, when the four rascals who held up the trolley car went to the old house afterward and dug it up."

"And carried it off, I suppose?" said the squire.

"That was their intention, but I put a spoke in their wheel."

"In what way?" asked the now thoroughly interested gentleman.

Don then explained all that happened in the cellar while he was concealed there, after which he went on and told

the squire how he had dragged the bag holding the silverware out of the cellar and dumped it into the water butt.

"And there it is at the present moment, I'm willing to bet."

"This is a most remarkable story, Bruce," said the squire. "If you really have saved my property, as you say, and it is restored to me, you shall have my check for the full amount of the reward."

"Thank you, sir. If you will telephone to the Bridgeton police station and have two or three officers sent over here I'll pilot them to the house, and they may be able to catch the rascals who are guilty of the hold-up. At any rate, we'll bring your property back with us."

"I can't leave my chair, Bruce. The telephone is over in the corner. You will oblige me by ringing up the station and giving the authorities whatever directions you think necessary under the circumstances."

Don did so, and told the squire that two policemen would start for his house at once.

The hold-up had long ago been reported, and half a dozen officers were out on the lookout for the rascals.

The officers came inside of fifteen minutes, and Don started with them for the deserted house.

When they arrived at the building the cellar door was found broken in, but the birds had flown.

They had evidently taken alarm at the disappearance of the silver and had skipped the place.

With the assistance of the policemen the water butt was overturned and the bag of silverware was found where Don had hidden it.

There was little danger that it would suffer from the soaking it had received, so Don lifted it on his back and, guarded by the officers, carried it over to the trolley, where they waited for a car bound for Bridgeton.

Don got off with the bag in front of the squire's home, while the policemen went on to town to report their failure to capture the four ruffians.

The boy carried the bag into the house and to the squire's library.

"I guess you'll find all your stolen goods here, sir," said Don, beginning to untie the string around the neck of the sack.

"I hope so," replied the delighted gentleman. "Take them out and lay them on the floor, one by one, and then oblige me by ringing for a servant."

When the sack had been emptied of its precious contents, Don summoned one of the servants, and the squire sent her upstairs to ask Mrs. Dalton to come to the library at once.

She came, and was astonished to see the stolen silverware displayed upon the floor of the room.

"Why, William, how did you recover it?"

"Through this young man, Donald Bruce, the son of Mrs. Bruce, of Oakland."

"Indeed?" replied the lady. "I should like to hear——"

"First count the articles and see if they tally with the list of the different things that were taken that night," interrupted her husband.

Mrs. Dalton went over the articles that had been in the bag and declared that nothing was missing.

"I am glad to hear it, my dear," replied the squire. "Now, if you will go to my desk and make out a check to Donald Bruce's order for the sum of five hundred dollars, I will sign it."

The lady did as her husband requested, and inside of five minutes Don had the check in his hand and was feeling like a small capitalist.

Mrs. Dalton then wanted to hear how the stolen property had been recovered, and Don obliged her with his story, just as he had previously related it to Squire Dalton.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, when he had finished. "You are a plucky boy. I think few boys would have attempted what you did for any reward, and I doubt if another boy in the whole county would have saved the silverware so cleverly. You have easily earned the reward, and I congratulate you on its acquisition."

"Thank you, ma'am. And now, as I have another errand in the neighborhood, I think I will go. I am very much obliged to you for the check, Squire Dalton."

"You are entirely welcome, Bruce," replied the squire. "I hope the money will be of great service to you."

"There isn't any doubt of that, sir," replied Don, taking up his hat and bowing himself out of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

INTRODUCES OUR HEROINE AND OTHERS.

Don had quite an exciting story to tell his mother and sister when he got home, just about dark.

When he exhibited his five-hundred-dollar check there was surprise and joy in the household.

"Half of this I am going to present to you, mother," he said beamingly. "The balance I want to use to push my latest invention, the rock-crusher, forward."

"You are always thinking of mother, aren't you, Don?" the little woman said, throwing her arms around her son's neck and kissing him fondly.

"Why not?" he answered. "Aren't you always thinking and planning for me?"

"And where do I come in?" laughed Edith.

"You must settle that with mother," smiled the boy. "You come in next to her with me."

"I don't mind playing second fiddle in so good a cause," replied Edith.

The Oakland Times got hold of the particulars of the recovery of Squire Dalton's stolen silverware in time to print the story in the following morning's paper, and by the average breakfast hour nearly everybody in the town was talking about Don Bruce, the hero of the affair.

Sam Jenkins saw the account in cold type, and as soon as he had finished the morning meal he rushed over to call

on his chum and to congratulate him on earning the reward offered six weeks before by the squire.

"You're in luck, Don," he cried, as soon as he met his friend. "Five hundred dollars is a lot of money. I wish I had so much."

"Yes," admitted Don, "it is quite a little boodle."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Well, I've given half of it to mother, to begin with. The rest——"

"You're going to put into your inventions, I suppose?" interjected Sam.

"Well, I think I'll take out a patent for my rock-crusher."

"That will cost you one hundred dollars, you said."

"Something like that, including the drawings, etc."

"And after you get out your patent, what then?"

"I'll look out for somebody with money to build a crusher and put it into operation, so as to demonstrate its utility."

"That means you'll sell a half-interest in the invention?"

"Yes."

"How long will it take to get your patent registered at Washington?"

"It will be registered just as soon as the patent is applied for, but it may be some months before the patent itself is granted."

While the boys were talking in the dining-room of the Bruce cottage, four men, the rascals who had been engaged in the trolley hold-up, were seated in a back room of a cheap drinking saloon in Bridgeton.

They had just been reading the Bridgeton Sunday Signal, which had printed the details of the recovery by Squire Dalton of his silverware, and the account had dispelled something that had until then been a great mystery to them.

They vented their chagrin and anger in imprecations and muttered threats of vengeance on the plucky boy who had outwitted them.

"We've got to get square with that cub," growled the fellow who had chased Don unsuccessfully with the switch-bar.

"And we will, too," responded Burley, thumping the table with his hairy fist.

"How are we goin' to do it?" asked one of his companions, named Grundy.

"That's what we've got to figger on right here," said the fourth rascal, known as Croker.

"He lives in Oakland," put in the first speaker, whose picture was in the New York Rogue's Gallery under the name of Strype, though whether that was his real name, or an alias, the police did not know.

"He's a nervy young monkey," said Burley. "And to think he was in the cellar all the time we was diggin' for that bag, and we never suspected that we were bein' watched."

"If we'd have caught him," growled Strype, savagely, "I reckon there'd have been a funeral at his house."

"I reckon there would, too," nodded Grundy, significantly.

"We must get hold of him and make him cough up that five hundred dollars he got," said Croker. "If we kin scare the money out of him we don't need to do him up."

"That's a good idea, and we must work it right away, before he gets the chance to put it in a bank," spoke up Grundy.

"Hold on," interposed Burley. "Didn't the paper say that Squire Dalton gave him a check for the five hundred dollars? If we took the check from him that wouldn't do us no good."

Strype grabbed the paper and started to read the story again, to see if it said that the boy had got a check and not the actual bills.

"Here it is," he said, laying his finger on the spot. "He got a check."

Thas was disappointing news to the ruffians.

"That blocks us," gritted Burley. "Revenge is all very well, but money is better. We hain't got any too much of the ready, and we need it to keep out of the clutches of the cops."

"But you don't mean to let that cub have the laugh on us, do you?" cried Strype, angrily.

"Not if I kin help it," replied Burley.

"We've got to be cautious," interjected Grundy. "He saw our faces in the cellar, and it's likely he'll know us again if he sees us."

"All the more reason why we should do him up," said Strype.

The rascals put their heads together and deliberated the knotty question for half an hour before they came to a final arrangement.

Burley produced a pair of bushy false whiskers, which he adjusted to his face, and, having dressed himself in a comparatively new suit of clothes loaned him by the proprietor of the joint where he and his associates were in hiding, started for Oakland to make certain investigations.

At ten o'clock that day Don and Sam started for Sunday-school.

Neither, however, had a place in a class—Don was librarian and Sam was his assistant.

They had all they could do during class hour to replace the returned books on the shelves and fill the requisitions for new ones in time to be sent to the various teachers for distribution among the scholars.

After Sunday-school was out Don managed, as usual, to meet Miss Marian White, daughter of the president of the Oakland Bank, at the door.

"Good morning, Miss Marian," he said, lifting his hat politely.

"Good morning, Don," she replied, with a bright smile, extending her gloved hand. "Lovely day, isn't it?"

Don was about to reply that it was, when a sprucely dressed boy, named Herbert Shaw, son of the Oakland Bank's cashier, stepped up and rudely elbowed him back, at the same time addressing the girl.

"Delighted to see you this morning, Miss White," he

said, with a bow and a lift of his hat. "Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you home?"

"You will have to excuse me, Mr. Shaw," replied the pretty girl, somewhat coldly, for she did not like Herbert Shaw even a little bit, although he was a member of the same social set to which she belonged and paid her a great deal of attention in one way or another. "Mr. Bruce is going to see me to my home."

Herbert's lip curled, and he cast a scornful glance at Don, who stood to one side.

Donald Bruce, in Herbert's estimation, was a common boy, and not entitled to recognition by well-to-do people with advantages denied to those who were not well supplied with this world's goods.

Master Shaw thought that Don had a great deal of nerve to speak to the daughter of the president of the Oakland Bank, and the prettiest girl in town.

He was also surprised that Marian White permitted such familiarity.

He could not understand what she saw in Don to be so gracious to him.

This was the third time that Herbert had failed to monopolize Marian's society when Don Bruce was around, and it made him angry and disgusted.

He knew better, however, than to give expression to his sentiments in the girl's presence.

He repressed his rage under a sickly smile, bowed and permitted Marian to walk off with his rival.

But he looked after them with no pleasant expression on his features, while he tapped his well-polished shoes with the point of his slender ivory-headed cane in a way that indicated his feelings.

"That's the time you got left, Herb," chuckled a voice at his elbow.

He turned quickly about, with an angry expression on his lips, but checked himself when he saw it was the pastor's son, Henry, who had spoken.

"Don't be too sure of that, Hal Chase," he said, with an unpleasant laugh.

"I can't help being sure of it when I heard you ask Miss White to permit you to see her home, and she turned you down in favor of Don Bruce. I call that a cold shake."

"How do you make that out? That fellow happened to ask her first."

"No, he didn't. You stepped up before he had a chance to. I heard all that passed between them. He simply wished her good morning, and then you butted in and got in the neck for doing so. It is very evident she don't care to have you see her home; that's why she as good as asked Bruce to escort her."

This was decidedly unpalatable information for Herbert's ears.

"Do you mean to say that he didn't ask to see her home?" he demanded.

"That's just what I mean to say," chuckled Henry Chase, who took pleasure in aggravating Herbert wherever Marian White was concerned.

The reason for this was that Henry had a sneaking liking for the girl himself.

He was smart enough to see that Herbert did not stand one, two, three in her estimation, while Don Bruce had the inner track of every one.

Privately he hated Don in consequence, but no one would ever have thought so from his manner toward Bruce.

He was an adept, like his mother, in hiding his real sentiments under a mask.

He might have treated Don with the same haughty exclusiveness that Herbert displayed, but he did not.

He played his cards differently.

At present he was using Herbert Shaw as the monkey used the cat—to pull his chestnuts out of the fire, so to speak.

"I hate that fellow!" snorted Herbert, malevolently.

"We always hate those who get the better of us," grinned Henry.

"Do you mean to say he's got the better of me?" roared Herbert, furiously. "He—a poor boy?"

"It seems evident that he has, as far as Miss White is concerned."

"I don't believe it. It's preposterous! That fellow isn't in my class."

"That's right—he isn't, but he gets there, just the same."

The way Chase said it nearly drove Herbert frantic, while Henry rubbed his hands together and chuckled quietly.

He was trying to fan a live coal into a blaze for some purpose he had in view.

"Look here, Hal, are we going to put up with this sort of thing? Are we going to allow that low boy to butt in among his social superiors?"

"Do you know any way of taking him down?" asked Henry, with sly emphasis.

"No, I don't; but if you'll stand in with me on some scheme I'll push it through."

"You haven't the nerve, Herb," laughed Henry, tantalizingly.

"I'll bet I have. Are you with me?"

"It isn't my funeral, Herb," replied Henry, softly. "But I know what I would do if I was in your shoes and a fellow tried to do me out of my girl."

"What would you do?"

"I'd get back at him in a way that would settle him for keeps."

"How?"

"Are you going my way? Well, let's walk on and I'll tell you."

CHAPTER VII.

DON IS UP AGAINST IT HARD.

"You must excuse me, Mr. Bruce, for forcing myself upon you, as it were," said Marian White, as she and Don walked away from the church, but I didn't want Herbert Shaw to see me home, so——"

"Don't mention it, Miss Marian," replied Don, gallantly. "It gives me great satisfaction to be accorded the pleasure of your society."

"Dear me, you said that very nicely, indeed. Do you really mean it?"

"I certainly do. I know that I am not exactly your social equal, Miss Marian, but——"

"Don't say another word, Don," interrupted the girl, in a decided way. "Social position isn't everything, in my estimation. I have always found you to be a manly, straightforward boy—a boy that any girl ought to be proud to number among her acquaintances. The fact that your social circumstances are against you does not weigh with me at all. I am glad to have you for a friend. My father and mother like and respect you, and that is enough for me. You are just as welcome at our home as any of our friends."

"You are very kind to say so, Miss Marian," replied Don, gratefully.

Miss White flashed a look into his face that set his blood coursing quicker through his veins.

Then she changed the subject and began talking about the Sunday-school picnic that was to come off shortly.

In this way they walked along the shady street that led to the White mansion.

Marian invited him in when they came to the front gate and Don accepted the invitation.

He spent a very pleasant hour with her, and at five o'clock took his departure for home.

That night Don retired about ten o'clock.

His room overlooked the kitchen one-story extension, and when the weather permitted he slept with both windows wide open.

On the present evening, though the weather was fairly warm, the sky was overcast, and, fearing that it might rain before morning, Don left his windows only partly open.

The house had been dark and silent for three hours, when four men, who had come down the street from the direction of the trolley road, paused before the cottage and looked up at the windows.

They held a brief consultation, then one of them raised the latch of the gate and the entire party passed through into the garden.

One of them led the way to the rear of the building and pointed at the kitchen extension and the partly open windows above it.

"That's easy," said the voice of Strype, with a chuckle. "I wonder if he's a light sleeper?"

"Light or heavy, we'll be in that room in a brace of shakes," replied Burley. "Strype and me'll do the business," he added. "You two keep your weather optics on the lookout for any stragglers along the street."

Burley and his companion, Strype, easily clambered to the roof of the kitchen without making any noise to speak about.

They were well trained in that method of working their way into a house and as active as two cats.

Once on the roof of the extension they were almost on a level with the windows of Don's room.

Strype knelt down on all fours; Burley stepped on his back, and seizing the window sash raised it softly.

Then he climbed into the room.

Strype followed him a moment later.

The room was dark, and, as the night was gloomy, Burley took a small, flat dark-lantern from his pocket, which he had lighted before he left the yard below, and opening the slide flashed a disk of light around the room.

Don lay quietly asleep in bed on the opposite side of the room.

"See if the door is locked," whispered Burley. "If it isn't, and there is a key, turn it, or a bolt, shoot it."

Strype obeyed the directions.

"Now grab him by the arms while I gag him," said Burley.

The touch of the rascal's hands startled Don into wakefulness, only for him to find himself a prisoner and helpless.

Burley tied a handkerchief around his mouth, then pieces of stout cord were produced from their pockets, and his arms were forced behind his back and secured.

His ankles were then bound together, and the two crooks surveyed their work with much satisfaction.

While Don could not get a good look at his captors, owing to the darkness, he had a strong suspicion that they were two of the crowd whom he had outgeneraled in the cellar of the deserted house.

He presumed their intention was to rob the house, not that they would be able to find much that would pay them to carry off, and that as a preliminary they had secured him from interfering with their plans.

He was soon undeceived on that score.

"Now," said Burley, "get outside on the roof and I'll hand him down to you."

Strype obeyed orders.

Burley grasped Don in his muscular arms and passed him out of the window to his associate, who in turn passed him down to the other two men below.

Burley then tore a sheet off the bed, gathered up all the boy's garments and tied them in the sheet, after which he dropped the bundle on to the kitchen roof.

Then he got out of the window and, throwing the bundle to the ground, followed it.

He then led the way to the barn behind the house and, taking a small jimmy out of his pocket, forced the door.

"Fetch him in here," he said to his companions.

The entire party entered and closed the door after them.

"Now, young man," said Burley, handing Strype the dark-lantern and drawing his revolver, "there are your clothes, and we're goin' to let you loose so you can dress yourself. Don't you dare touch that gag about your mouth, or you'll get a crack on your scone that you won't like. Untie him, Strype. Grundy and Croker, get your guns out. If he makes the slightest attempt to break away hit him over the head with the butts."

Don saw that he had no show at all, so he calmly obeyed the mandate to dress himself.

During the process he cudged his brain in vain to account for the tactics of the rascals in thus routing him out of his bed and out of the house.

What could be their object?

It looked decidedly sinister to him.

It looked as if they had made themselves acquainted, through the newspaper, with his agency in the squire's recovery of his silver plate, and that they were going to get back at him in a way that would not be just to his liking.

As soon as he had put on his shoes, Burley took the longest piece of rope and tied it securely to one of Don's ankles.

The other end, after leaving sufficient play for the boy to walk, he wound several times around his own wrist.

"Now, young feller, I reckon you know who we are, even if it's too dark to recognize our faces," said Burley. "You butted into our business yesterday in the cellar of that deserted house between this town and Bridgeton and you served us a measly trick. It done us out of a lot of dough and put five hundred dollars into your trousers. If it wasn't that you got a check instead of the real flimsies we might talk business with you. We'd let you buy yourself out of what's a-comin' to you. Seein' as there ain't no way of you doin' that now, things has to take their course. When a feller does us dirt, whether he's man or boy, we don't rest till we square up the account. We've found you guilty on the first count, and we're goin' to put it over you in a way you're not likely to forget. I reckon that's all I've got to tell you, so now we'll proceed to business."

The ruffian led the way out of the barn; Don was compelled to step out alongside of him, and the others followed.

It was about two o'clock in the morning, and the street, which was on the outskirts of town, was as silent and deserted as a churchyard.

Burley turned in the direction which would lead them still further away from the town limits, and the party tramped away in silence.

Don wondered what the rascals intended to do with him.

Beyond the fact that they were taking him in the direction of the K. & P. railroad tracks, which ran beside the river for some distance, he was entirely in the dark as to their plans.

A cool breeze rustled the leaves of the many trees along the route and fanned the faces of the walkers.

Don could almost imagine that he was being led to execution.

At length a dark, serpentine stream came into view, which the boy knew was the Savage River.

The railroad tracks lay just this side of it.

A light burned dimly in a track-walker's shanty, and there was a white bull's-eye shining from a nearby switch.

As soon as they came to the tracks, Burley turned abruptly toward a cutting that lay about a quarter of a mile away.

They entered the cut, and, after proceeding halfway through, Burley called a halt.

"This will do," he said. "This is the track used by the Atlantic Express, which passes here at about two-forty. Now, tie this chap's arms behind his back, Strype."

Don, alarmed at the suggestiveness of Burley's words, made a sudden spring in an effort to escape.

But it was futile; the rope attached to his ankle, the other end of which was wound around Burley's wrist, came taut and tripped him up.

Strype jumped upon him as he fell to the ground and in a moment or two his arms were tied.

"Now," said Burley, "tie him to the track so that his right leg will lay well across the rail. The express will amputate it. We'll wait up yonder at the mouth of the cut until the train goes through, then we'll come back and tie up the stump so he won't bleed to death."

Strype, assisted by Grundy, carried these directions into effect, and inside of five minutes Don was bound to one of the ties, with his right leg secured across one rail.

"Now, young feller, the express will soon attend to your case," said Burley, with an evil laugh. "This is what you get for buttin' into our business."

Then they left him and walked toward the upper end of the cut.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PASSING OF THE EXPRESS.

The reader may perhaps be able to imagine Don Bruce's feelings as he lay stretched out in that uncomfortable position, with his right leg firmly tied down over the cold and unyielding steel rail.

The physical inconvenience of his position was to be compared with the mental torture that he began to endure as the moment slipped away and he realized to its fullest extent the awful situation he was in.

The express was due to pass that point inside of fifteen or twenty minutes, and the train was bound to cripple him for life.

His career would be practically spoiled if he survived the shock of the dreadful ordeal and he would become an object for sympathy ever after.

He began a desperate struggle to try and free himself, but to no purpose.

The rascally Strype had been a sailor in days gone by, and he knew how to tie a knot that would hold.

The harder Don tried to extricate himself the more hopeless the task appeared to be.

With a groan he lay back over the outside edges of the ties, his head hanging down, and the cold perspiration of despair oozing out in drops on his forehead.

His plucky work of the preceding afternoon was about to cost him dear.

Brave as he was at heart, his present predicament was trying the very fibers of his soul.

At that desperate moment there flashed through his mind the text of the morning's sermon.

Instinctively he began to pray as he had never prayed before in his life.

He asked with all the fervor of his nature that he might be saved from this fearsome sacrifice.

The thought of such a fate was madness to a vigorous and ambitious boy like Don, who prided himself on his health and strength.

At that moment far away down the track, beyond the curve three miles to the west of Oakland, came the whistle of the express as it passed a crossing.

Don heard it, and he started up a bit and then sank back with a groan of despair.

There was no help, then, for him—he was doomed.

At that instant an electric shock went through his body—something had cut his fingers, bound under his back.

Even at that tense moment he was curious enough to know what had caused the sensation.

He worked his fingers about and recognized that he was almost leaning upon the razor edge of a broken bottle.

A sudden thought flashed through his brain, like the rays of a searchlight illustrating a dark landscape, that if he could free his hands he might save himself yet, for, though he could not hope to untie the knots which bound his leg to the tie, he had a sharp knife in his pocket, and its blade would soon liberate his limb.

With feverish energy, utterly disregarding the cuts his fingers received, he worked his body so that the rope that held his wrists bore right over the edge of the bottle.

Then he worked the rope with a sawing motion over the keen edge of the glass.

At that moment the headlight of the express, flying along at a speed of nearly a mile in two minutes, came into sight, and Don felt the vibratory thrill of the locomotive's drivers on the rail.

It was a singing sound that steadily grew into a low hum that broadened and swelled out until it filled his ears with a noise like thunder.

"Heaven help me!" he gasped.

Snap!

The rope that had held his wrists parted and his hands were free.

With the music of the rails ever rising like the cadence of some powerful organ ringing in his ears, he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out his jackknife.

Pulling the blade open, he began sawing at the rope that held his leg down.

"Thank Heaven it's sharp!" he breathed, working away with desperate energy.

But he had only a moment or two to save himself, for that iron monster, with its heavy load of sleepers, was sweeping down upon him like a rushing mountain avalanche.

In fifteen seconds it would be upon him.

He strained at his leg as he sawed away with the knife.

Suddenly the rope unraveled its last strand, and he dragged his leg from the track.

Not a moment too soon, either, for as he rolled over he felt the roar and the wind blast as of a fierce tornado passing over him.

The noise was terrific in his ears, and for a moment it seemed as if he would be sucked under the wheels of the passing train and ground to death.

Then it passed, and he lay breathless and trembling under the leaden sky that hung low over the gloomy landscape.

Suddenly he remembered that the ruffians who had placed him in his desperate position were coming back to see that he did not bleed to death after the amputation of his leg, which they had figured on as a certainty.

The bare possibility of these men recapturing him, after what he had gone through with, started the boy into instant action.

He sprang to his feet and ran toward the other end of the cut.

"When they find that I have in some unexplained way escaped the fate they laid out for me they are sure to search for me in this neighborhood, so it's up to me to make myself scarce around here. I don't propose to give them a second shy at me. They'd take surer means next time to accomplish their purpose. I must notify the police and try to get them arrested."

Accordingly, Don, as soon as he got out of the cut, mounted the hillside and made his way as fast as he could to the road up which he had been brought half an hour before.

As soon as he reached it he turned his face toward Oakland.

But he soon found that the experience he had been through had taken some of the starch out of him.

Now that he was comparatively safe, the reaction on his nerves made him feel weak and ill.

His legs wobbled as he tried to hurry on, while his fingers twitched, and he felt a cold sweat breaking out all over his body.

Several times he paused to rest along the lonesome road, but never without keeping a bright lookout behind for the possible reappearance of his enemies.

Within a quarter of a mile or so of his own home he sat down to rest on the threshold of a deserted story-and-a-half building which had formerly done duty as a blacksmith shop.

Before he was quite aware of the fact he dozed off to sleep.

After a time he woke up with a start.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed. "I believe I've been asleep. This won't do," and he jumped to his feet.

How long he had been dozing he could not tell, but he was conscious that he felt much better.

His weakness and nervousness had passed off and he seemed to be as strong as he had ever been.

"I must get along," he said, "or those rascals will get clean off."

As he was on the point of starting on again he heard the sound of voices in the direction whence he came.

Glancing cautiously back along the street, he saw the shadowy forms of his four enemies coming along at a rapid pace.

There was no way for him to avoid them except by entering the shanty and waiting for them to get by.

He did so at once, and took shelter behind a large empty barrel at the back of the place.

To his dismay the rascals paused in front of the building and then entered it.

CHAPTER IX.

DON PLANS TO CAPTURE THE FOUR CROOKS.

"Dig up the tools, Strype," said the voice of Burley; "and be quick about it, for we haven't no time to spare. Since that young cub managed to free himself—though how he did it beats me—and got off clear, this town ain't a safe place for us no longer. We'll risk that job we planned the other day, the cracking of Banker White's house, I mean, and give the papers something else to print about us, and the people hereabouts something more to remember us by."

"One of these days I hope we'll come back, when we ain't expected, and pickle that slippery young monkey for good," growled Grundy, with a smothered imprecation. "I'd give somethin' to know how he got clear of that rail."

"Oh, dash him! We've somethin' more important to think about now," replied Burley, in an ill-humored tone.

"That's right," coincided the man named Croker, a chap who had served several terms in different States' prisons for various offenses.

While they were talking Strype was unearthing a kit of burglar implements he had buried in the shanty a few days before.

He lost no time over it, and in a few minutes dragged the bag containing the tools to the surface.

"All right," he said, taking the bag under his arm. "Let's be off. Where's this crib we're goin' to crack?"

"It's on the outskirts, not very far from here," replied Burley. "If we work lively we ought to clean the place out inside of an hour."

"Any dogs or burglar alarms?" asked Grundy.

"Both," said Burley. "But I've got a club that'll settle the canine. As to the alarms, there is none attached to the cellar gratin's, I guess. Our tools will force one of them in a jiffy and we shall be inside in no time at all. Come on."

The four rascals then started for the residence of the president of the Oakland Bank.

"My goodness!" cried Don. "So they're going to break

into Marian's home. I must try and prevent them from carrying out their project. If I could only reach the police in time to head them off. I must get somebody to help me in this matter. I'll have to wake Sam up and send him to the station."

As soon as the ruffians were out of sight Don hurried on down the street.

Passing his own home, he directed his steps toward Sam's.

He knew just where his chum slept.

His room was on the third floor back, above the dining-room.

Don entered the yard of the Jenkins's property and, seizing a handful of gravel, began to bombard Sam's window.

His friend was not a heavy sleeper, so when the third volley of gravel rattled against one of the sashes of his room he awoke with a start.

"What was that?" he asked himself. "I heard a noise."

A fourth shower of gravel struck the window panes.

"Great pumpkins!" he cried, springing out of bed and going to the window to look out. "Who's firing stones at my window at this hour in the morning?"

As his face appeared at the glass a fifth contribution of the gravel rattled against the panes like a fusillade of small shot.

"Why, I believe that's Don," he ejaculated. "I wonder what's up?"

He immediately opened the window and looked down.

"That you, Don?" he asked.

"Yes. Dress yourself quick and come down."

"Why, what's in the wind?" asked the surprised Sam.

"Don't ask questions, but do as I tell you," said Don, peremptorily.

"It's only half-past three o'clock," objected Sam.

"Are you coming down, or aren't you?" demanded Don.

"Sure, if you say so," replied the mystified Sam. "But can't you tell me——"

"Tell you nothing till you come down here. Hurry up, for time is precious."

"Gee whizz! I wonder what is the matter?" Sam said to himself, as he retired from the window to put on his clothes.

Inside of six minutes he appeared at the front door and found Don waiting for him there.

"Where's your hat?" Don asked. "Get it."

"Oh, I say, what does this all mean?" insisted Sam.

"Shut up and get your hat," replied Don, starting for the gate.

Sam took down his hat from the rack, and, after closing the hall door behind him, followed his friend to the sidewalk.

"What's the trouble?" asked Sam, as Don seized him by the arm and began to drag him along the street.

"The trouble is burglary."

"Burglary!" gasped Sam. "What do you mean? Somebody broke into your—but this isn't the way to your house."

"Who said it was? A gang of crooks, the same four that held up the trolley car Saturday afternoon, are at the residence of Mr. White by this time, prepared to break in and clean out the house."

"Gracious! How do you know that?"

"Never mind how. I'll tell you that later. I want you to run as fast as you can to the police station and tell them to send half a dozen officers there as soon as possible."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going over to Mr. White's house to keep watch on the rascals and try and prevent them from getting away before the policemen come."

"All right," replied Sam. "I'll go to the station."

He set off at once at a swinging trot, while Don cut across to the street, half a block down which stood the White mansion in the midst of spacious and well-kept grounds.

Don approached the residence of Mr. White with some caution, as he entertained a wholesome respect for the four desperate crooks who had designs on the banker's property, and he did not wish to have another personal encounter with them.

He judged that one of the rascals would remain outside the building on the watch, while the other three attended to the business in hand.

The cloudiness of the night or early morning covered his movements to a great extent, just as it helped the ruffians themselves.

He decided that the best way to approach the place was from the back, and to do this he cut across the grounds of Mr. White's next-door neighbor and thus gained an entrance to the White property back of the carriage-house, where the coachman and the gardener slept.

He saw no way of awakening these men without attracting attention to the fact—that is, if one of the crooks was on the watch—and he did not think it best to run the risk.

As he drew closer to the house he looked warily about for the watcher, but could see no one.

He crossed the smooth and velvety lawn on his hands and knees until he got close up to the building, and still there was no sign that the rascals were on or about the premises.

He had heard the chief crook of the bunch say that they would enter the house by one of the cellar gratings, so Don hunted around to see if one of the gratings had been forced.

The gratings under the kitchen were the easiest and most likely ones to be attacked, and thither the boy made his way.

He found one of the gratings torn from its fastenings, which was a sure sign that the villains were in the house.

"Now what shall I do?" he asked himself. "It looks as if the whole of them are inside. I think I may venture to arouse the coachman and the gardener and give them an idea of the situation. It is likely that they have a revolver each. I guess that's the best thing to do."

He crawled around to the back of the kitchen, then rose on his legs and dashed for the carriage-house.

There was a bell-pull alongside the door which opened

on the stairs communicating with the floor on which the men slept.

Don pulled lustily at this, and presently one of the windows above was thrown up and the coachman's voice asked who was there.

"I am Don Bruce. Dress yourself and come down quick. Arouse the gardener, too. There are four burglars going through the house. I have sent for the police, but it will be some little time before they can reach this place."

The coachman was clearly startled.

He started to ask some questions, but the boy cut him short with a request to hurry.

Don waited with great impatience for them to make their appearance.

Finally the coachman unlocked the door and stepped out.

"Got a gun?" asked Don.

"I've brought my revolver."

"Has the gardener got one, too?"

"Yes. He'll fetch it when he comes down."

While they were talking the gardener joined them.

"The rascals have entered through one of the cellar windows near the kitchen, the grating of which they have wrenched off. Have you anything that will answer for a club in a small way?"

The gardener said he had a policeman's short club in his room, and he got it for Don.

The three then started for the house.

When they reached the place where the grating had been forced, Don pointed it out to his companions.

"That's the way they entered," he said. "Now, the most prudent way to deal with these fellows, who are armed and a mighty bad lot, is to lie in wait for them to come out with their plunder, when we'll be able to take them by surprise and at something of a disadvantage. The longer they are about the job the more chance we shall have of being reinforced by the officers."

The coachman and the gardener agreed that Don's proposition was the most sensible one under the circumstances, as neither of them was anxious to run the chance of being shot by one of the crooks.

"Then you'd better go around front, where you can keep an eye on the hall door," said Don to the coachman, "while you," to the gardener, "keep watch on the side entry door. I'll stand guard here over the kitchen door, on the chance that they might make their exit at the back of the house."

A minute later each of them was at his post, on the lookout for the appearance of the crooks.

CHAPTER X.

THE FOILING OF THE BURGLARS.

Ten minutes passed away, which seemed like half an hour to Don, and there was not a sign to indicate the movements of the four burglars on the inside.

Inaction made the boy nervous and impatient.

Finally he determined, somewhat against his better judgment, to enter the house through the open cellar windows and see just what the crooks were doing.

He figured that the men had been at their nefarious work a good twenty minutes or more, and he calculated that they must be pretty slick chaps at the business not to have awakened the banker or some member of the household by their presence.

Don found no trouble in entering the cellar.

He moved around cautiously, trying to find the stairs and to avoid colliding with the diverse contents of the place.

Finally he ran the risk of striking a match to illuminate the gloom.

The cellar was full of boxes, barrels and other articles usually kept down there.

In the center of the concrete floor stood an up-to-date heating apparatus, which had gone out of commission with the advent of the warm weather.

Beside it was a hot-water apparatus, the fire of which had been banked for the night.

In one corner stood the stairs leading to the entry above, and Don cautiously ascended the steps.

When he reached the floor above he paused to listen.

He could not hear a sound.

He turned the handle of the door that faced him and found himself in a big room, which proved to be the kitchen when he struck another match.

Don's brief survey showed him that it was a model culinary department—everything was in its place, and not a speck of dirt to be seen anywhere.

Right off the kitchen was a commodious pantry, and beyond that was the spacious dining-room, finished in oak.

The gas was turned low in one of the burners, and on the table Don saw two bundles—the contents of the sideboard tied up in tablecloths.

Clearly this was the work of the crooks, though they were not to be seen, being presumably upstairs looting the other parts of the house.

"I'll just put these out of their reach, at any rate," said the boy to himself.

He carried both bags into the pantry, turned the key on them, and removed it.

Then he took off his shoes and started upstairs for the parlor floor.

Entering the back parlor cautiously, he found the gas turned low there, too.

Another bundle of plunder, which had been obtained from the front parlor, lay on the floor near the dividing portieres.

Don collared this and shoved it behind a Japanese screen which stood in one corner.

The pink globe light that illumined the main hall near the entrance burned all night, though turned low, and threw a subdued radiance upon the stairs.

Don, as he stood looking at it, wondered when the rascals would come down from the region above.

It was altogether too risky a matter for him to go up, as he had only the small "billy" to defend him with against the revolvers of the crooks.

At that moment, with startling suddenness, the report of a revolver rang through the house.

"My gracious!" cried Don. "Who fired that shot? Mr. White or one of the burglars?"

Don heard a woman, whom he thought to be the banker's wife, utter a scream.

The shot had doubtless awakened every one in the house.

Marian's room was on the third floor, while three female servants, one of whom was the cook, slept on the attic floor.

The possibility that murder might be done by those rascals, now that they were known to be in the house, roused Don to action.

Without stopping to consider the peril that faced him upstairs, he sprang for the stairway and dashed up two steps at a time.

As he struck the landing above he came into collision with a man in the dark, and both went down together on the thick carpet, Don on top.

"Blast you! Can't you see where you're goin'?" cried the voice of Grundy, who evidently mistook the boy for one of his companions. "Let me up, will you?"

Quick as thought Don struck him a blow over the head with the billy.

The crack was a hard one and the ruffian rolled over unconscious.

Don's hand came into contact with his hip-pocket and felt the butt of his revolver.

He took possession of the weapon in a moment.

Before he could rise from his knees a second crook, Croker, came dashing for the stairs with a bundle in each hand.

Between his hurry and the darkness he did not notice that an obstruction lay in his path.

He tripped over Grundy's body and, being unable to save himself, pitched headlong down the stairs.

He and the bundles arrived in a confused heap at the bottom.

His career on earth was over for good and all, for he had broken his neck.

Don, however, paid no attention to his downward flight, but rushed for the room where he heard a struggle going on.

Whether the woman who had uttered the scream had fainted or not, certain it is no second sound came from her.

The door opening off the upper hall was open and the gas was lighted at full blast.

The burner was provided with a patent apparatus by which the gas when apparently out was not actually so, but was turned down to a spark, which could be instantly rekindled into a full blaze by pulling a small brass chain.

When Don appeared at the doorway a dramatic scene met his view.

Mr. White, in his nightclothes, lay bound and gagged on

the floor, with Burley bending over him as if he had just finished the job.

Mrs. White lay in bed, staring in terror at a pointed revolver in the hand of Strype.

The boy's sudden appearance was for the moment unnoticed, and the first intimation the two rascals had of danger was when Don raised the weapon he had taken from Grundy and fired at Strype.

The bullet struck and shattered the hand that held the revolver, as the boy intended, and as the ruffian uttered a howl of pain the pistol fell to the floor.

Burley turned like a flash, snatched up his own revolver, which lay on the carpet, and would have shot Don, but the youth was too quick for him.

Don's second shot shattered his right arm, and both rascals were at the boy's mercy.

But they were not so easily subdued.

Strype reached down to pick his weapon up with his left hand.

"If you touch that gun I'll shoot," cried Don, covering the rascal.

Strype straightened up with an imprecation.

"The game is up with you chaps," continued the boy. "Back up against the wall yonder, both of you, or I won't answer for the consequences to you. I am not going to take any chances with either of you. If you make the least attempt to resist I shall feel bound in self-preservation to kill you."

The ruffians, recognizing that Don was master of the situation, sullenly did as he told them to.

Don then advanced into the room and, whipping out his jack-knife, cut the banker free, while he kept a wary eye on the wounded rascals.

Mr. White himself tore the gag from his mouth and stood up.

"Don Bruce!" the banker exclaimed, astonished to see the boy in his house at that hour in the morning, and under such stirring circumstances. "To what lucky chance are we indebted for your fortunate appearance in this emergency?"

"This is hardly a time for explanations, Mr. White," replied the boy, politely. "Let us secure these rascals first. Take this revolver and hold them in subjection while I tie them up with something."

"Keep your weapon, Don," replied the banker. "Mine is here on the floor. I shot at one of those scoundrels when I turned up the light and saw him in the room, but missed him. Then both of them sprang upon me and knocked me down. While I lay half-stunned I was gagged and tied as you found me."

Mr. White picked up his revolver and covered the two crooks, while Don bound their hands behind their backs with towels.

"There's another chap in the hall outside, whom I laid out, while the fourth, I think, is unconscious at the foot of the stairs, or possibly in the hands of your gardener or foot-

man, whom I aroused from their beds and left on guard over the front and side doors."

Between them they dragged Burley and Strype out into the hall, and the banker lighted the gas.

Grundy was just coming to his senses, and Don secured him as he had the others.

Croker lay silent and still, huddled up at the foot of the stairs, with the two bundles around him.

"I'll go downstairs and let the footman and gardener in," said Don.

"Do so," answered Mr. White, who remained on guard over the three prisoners in the upper hall.

That man was standing outside in a state of great excitement with the gardener, who had joined him when the sound of the shooting reached their ears.

They were of the opinion that nothing short of murder had been committed in the house, and, as they could not get in, they did not know what to do except watch for the appearance of the burglars, at whom they intended to shoot.

Before Don could say anything, Sam Jenkins and several policemen entered the gate and marched toward the house.

"You've come in time to be in at the death," said Don to the first officer. "We've caught the four burglars, and all you'll have to do is to carry them to the station."

"Where are they?" asked the policeman.

"One is unconscious at the foot of the front staircase," said the boy, leading the way, "while Mr. White is standing guard over the others upstairs."

"This man is dead," said the officer, when he pulled Croker out on the floor.

"Dead!" exclaimed Don, in surprise.

"As a coffin-nail. What happened to him? Did you shoot him?"

"No," replied the boy. "He fell down the whole flight."

"Then he has broken his neck, I should judge. There's some of the plunder, I see. Take it out of the way."

Don picked up the two bundles and started up the stairs, followed by the officers, the coachman, the gardener and Sam, who wanted to see whatever was going on.

Mr. White now addressed the policemen.

"Here's your prisoners," he said. "We've had a narrow escape. Only for that lad, Don Bruce, they would probably have got away with a good bit of my property. The rascals had me bound and gagged when Bruce most providentially appeared. He pluckily put those two fellows out of business. No man could have done better under the circumstances than he. He is entitled to the whole credit of the capture of these three villains."

The officers wasted no time in taking charge of the three crooks and marching them off to the station.

As for the body of Croker, it had to remain where it was until the coroner had viewed it, according to law, and given a permit for its removal.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH DON IS ABOUT THE WHOLE THING.

Marian and the three female servants were huddled together in their nightclothes on the third floor landing, nearly frightened to death.

"Papa," cried Marian, after the policemen had departed with their prisoners, "what has happened? Are you and mamma all right?"

"Yes, dear. There have been burglars in the house, and we have caught them. They are now in the hands of the police. Go back to bed. You will learn everything in the morning."

"I heard you mention Don Bruce's name, papa. Is he here?"

"Yes. It was Don who saved us from being robbed. Now, don't ask any more questions, but go back to your room. The trouble is all over."

Marian, like an obedient daughter, obeyed her father, while the servants also retired to their rooms; but there was no more sleep in the house that morning.

In fact, it was almost time for folks to be stirring, for it was five o'clock.

By this time Mrs. White appeared, fully dressed, and, after the coachman and the gardener had been dismissed, Don and Sam were invited into the front sitting-room on the second floor, and the banker asked the hero of the occasion to tell his story.

This he did, beginning from the time he had been overpowered by Burley and Strype in his own room and afterward marched over to tracks of the K. & P. Railroad.

His auditors were horrified when Don told how he had been bound to the track in the cut by the rascals, who had taken such a heartless method of punishing him for interfering with their plans to secure the silver buried in the old deserted house.

"How did you manage to escape?" asked the banker, his face reflecting the indignation he felt toward the remorseless ruffians.

Don explained how he owed his salvation to the broken bottle.

"It was a clear act of Providence that saved you, my lad," said Mr. White, solemnly, while his wife shuddered at the boy's narrow escape.

Then Don went on to say how, on his way back, when he was obliged to take refuge in the deserted blacksmith shop, he had overheard the rascals talk of their plan to rob Mr. White's house, and how he determined to foil them, if possible.

"I woke Sam Jenkins up and sent him for the officers, while I came on to this place alone."

Don then described all that followed up to the moment he appeared in the door of the bedroom and disabled the two arch scoundrels by a couple of well-directed shots.

The banker then had something to say.

He assured Don that he would never forget the obligation

that the boy had placed him under, and trusted that Don would permit him to offer him some substantial evidence of his gratitude and that of Mrs. White.

Don, however, declared that he was more than satisfied at having been successful in doing up the crooks, and he hoped that Mr. White would not think of offering him any reward for doing what he thought was only his plain duty.

It was six o'clock before the interview terminated, and then Don and his friend took their departure for their homes.

"You've done a big thing for yourself, Don," said Sam, when they were walking along the street. "You've made a good friend of Mr. White, and he's one of the most important and influential persons in town."

"I suppose so," replied Don. "I've no objection to making good friends, though I enjoyed the gentleman's acquaintance before."

"But he'll do more for you now than he would have done if this thing hadn't happened."

"That may be true; but, just the same, I'm not going to ask him to do anything for me."

"Why, wouldn't you like to get a place in his bank when you're through at High School? You couldn't find a better job in town."

"I wouldn't refuse a position in the Oakland Bank if it was offered to me, but I hardly think I will ask for it."

"Oh, he'll offer it to you, all right."

"Well, I've got a year of schooling before me yet, Sam. Maybe by that time my rock-crusher will be an established fact, and I may also have other irons in the fire to take my attention; so, you see, it isn't at all certain that I may care to take a job in the bank."

"If you don't take it, I hope you'll put in a good word for me," said Sam, eagerly.

"You may depend that I will always do what I can for you, Sam, though, to tell the truth, I'd like to have you as a partner in my future enterprises, and not have to take in an entire stranger."

"I'd like to be your partner first rate," replied Sam. "If your rock-crusher turns out to be a good thing maybe my father'll buy me an interest in it. At any rate, he thinks that you are a mighty smart boy."

"I'm much obliged to your father for his good opinion. In fact, I shall try to deserve the good opinion of everybody who knows me. It's a good capital to have when a fellow starts out in the world to make a success of himself."

"I guess it is. There are lots of knockers in this world that a chap has to buck against. Herbert Shaw, for instance, is one of that sort. He's down on you like a cargo of bricks."

"What for? I never did him any harm. In fact, we never associate. He doesn't seem to think I'm tony enough for him."

"He's down on you because you have the inside track with Marian White. After this morning's work you'll be so solid with her that nothing can do you up. I'm glad

you've got the bulge on him, for I don't like him for sour apples, though he is the son of Cashier Shaw."

"I can't help it if he is down on me on her account. If she chooses to associate with me I suppose that's her business, not Herbert Shaw's."

"That's right. Then there's another boy I don't like for a copper cent, and that is Henry Chase, Dominie Chase's son. I think he's about the slickest rooster in town. You never can tell anything about him. He's as smooth as silk to your face, even when he doesn't like you a little bit. I consider him a snake in the grass. He's dangerous. You can't find any excuse to fight with him, because he covers up his tracks too well. It's different with Shaw. He shows his sentiments in his face and by his actions, and you can always tell how you stand with him."

"I agree with you about Henry Chase. I don't think myself that he is to be trusted as a friend. If I had any business dealings with a person of his kind I should want to have a lawyer at my back to see that I didn't get the short end of the deal."

"If he studies law when he grows up, take my word for it, he'll be the foxiest lawyer that ever went to the bar."

"Well, you have to be pretty foxy to hold your own in the legal profession, I guess," laughed Don. "You're up against some pretty heady propositions at one time or another. The law can be twisted to suit 'most any kind of a case when a sharp practitioner undertakes to manipulate it. When you go to law you expect justice, but you don't always get it."

"That isn't any lie. My father has been taken in several times. He'd sooner compromise a case any day than bring it up for trial. Well, so long till I see you later. I'll have a thrilling yarn to tell my folks at breakfast, but it won't be a circumstance alongside the one that will be in the paper to-night about you and the four crooks. The people of this burg will have something else to talk about, in which you will figure again as the bright particular hero. In my opinion, you are about the most important personage in town at this moment," laughed Sam, as he turned in at his own gate, while Don continued on home.

CHAPTER XII.

A MEAN PIECE OF BUSINESS.

A policeman called at the Bruce cottage about ten o'clock that morning to take Don to the Police Court, where Burley, Strype and Grundy were to be examined before the magistrate.

Don was out in his workshop at the barn with Sam Jenkins, and both boys accompanied the officer.

Mr. White was in court, as were also the coachman and the gardener.

Don, of course, was the star witness, and his story of

itself was strong enough to cause the prisoners to be remanded for trial at the next term of the Criminal Court.

The other witnesses only served to make the chain of evidence stronger against the rascals.

Don also had to attend the coroner's inquest that afternoon and state what he knew of the way in which Croker came to his death.

Of course our hero was interviewed by the representative of the Oakland Daily Times, and the story that appeared in that afternoon's edition proved to be quite a sensational one.

All Oakland read it, and the town was agog over the attempted burglary of the residence of Banker White, as well as the diabolical attempt of the crooks to cripple the boy who incurred their wrath on the Saturday previous.

On the following Saturday the annual picnic of the Oakland Methodist Church was held at Greenwood Cove, a mile outside of the town.

By noon there were probably two hundred people at the grounds, the majority, as a matter of course, being under twenty years of age.

Don Bruce was there, and so was Sam Jenkins.

Neither would have missed the fun for a farm.

Don was especially interested in the picnic because he knew Marian White would be there.

Herbert Shaw, and Henry Chase went to the grove together, and they stuck together after they got there.

The day was a perfect one for a picnic, and everybody looked forward to having a good time.

The grove in question was fitted up particularly for such outings.

Tents, booths, pavilions, swings, merry-go-rounds and similar contrivances were erected there, as well as numerous tables, supplied with benches, for the accommodation of all who brought their own provisions.

Don was something of a lion, owing to the prominence he had so lately acquired in the newspapers, and everybody who knew him personally, and many who did not, had something nice to say to him.

There was not a girl at the picnic who was on speaking terms with him but felt proud to be seen talking to him, and those who were not acquainted with him were crazy for an introduction.

Under these circumstances Don was soon having the time of his life.

"It makes me sick to see the way the folks here are taking their hats off to that Don Bruce," remarked Herbert Shaw, discontentedly, to his friend, Henry Chase. "One would think he was a little tin god on wheels."

Henry chuckled.

"He's put it all over you with Marian White since he saved her father's house from being robbed. You aren't in it with him even a little bit now. Why, she hardly noticed you when you spoke to her a little while ago. Bruce is it, while you and me are not in the running."

"I'd give something to get square with him," growled Herbert, angrily.

"Why don't you? I gave you a pointer on the subject last Sunday."

"I can't do anything alone," grumbled Herbert. "I want you to stand by me."

"You can't do anything alone? Nonsense! You've got the chance cut and dried at hand."

"How?"

"The whole Bruce family is at the picnic. Haven't you eyes? Nothing easier, then, for you to slip away, ride back to town on the trolley, and go over to the Bruce place. Break open the barn and smash every one of those models that Don Bruce has been putting together this last year or so. Among them you'll find that rock-crusher that he's going to have patented, and which Howard Folsom, who has seen it, told me was a sure winner. If you only broke that one model up you'd break his heart, for he sets great store by it. He keeps all his plans in the bench drawer. Tear the whole bunch of them to pieces, and you'll have a splendid revenge."

"By Jove! I'd like to do it. You'll come with me, won't you?"

"Me? No. Why should I go? It's your affair, isn't it? If I was as sore on him as you are I wouldn't waste much time in doing what I've suggested to you."

"But I think you might go along for company," persisted Herbert.

"Where's your sand?" taunted Henry, whose object was to induce his companion to do the dirty work, while he participated in the benefit, without running any of the risk of discovery. "You're a pretty fellow to talk about getting back at a chap, and when the way is pointed out to you you weaken. You won't have such another chance in a long time to injure him in a tender spot. However, it's your funeral, not mine," added Henry, with apparent carelessness.

"Do you think I could do it without suspicion falling on me?" asked Herbert, nervously.

"Why, of course you could. You're not going to leave your card on his work-bench saying that you called in while he was away. You haven't threatened him, or had a scrap with him, so how is he going to suspect you? It's a regular cinch for you."

"Somebody might see me going into his yard."

"Not if you keep your eyes open, they won't."

"At any rate, I can swear I've been here in the grove all day."

"Sure you can."

"And you'll back me up in that?"

"Of course I will. You don't suppose I want to see you get into trouble?"

"Then I'll do it," said Herbert.

Henry's eyes snapped with satisfaction.

"Now you're talking," he said encouragingly. "I was afraid you were going to show the white feather. But I see you've got backbone, after all."

"Of course I've got backbone. I'm no coward," replied Herbert, indignantly.

"You'd better start, then, so that you can get back and show yourself around before any one will notice your absence," suggested Henry. "If anybody asks where you are I'll say you're out rowing on the lake somewhere."

"All right," replied Herbert.

"Don't go out by the front way, but sneak around by the shore of the lake and catch the trolley at Barnum's Crossing."

"Well, come part of the way with me."

"Sure," answered Henry, with alacrity.

The two well-dressed boys, belonging to the upper stratum of Oakland's social element, walked off in the direction of the lake, whose glittering waters could be seen in the near distance.

No one, to look at either, would have supposed that they were interested in the execution of as mean and contemptible a trick as any person could play upon an unsuspecting victim; but this was only another instance of the fact that appearances are often deceitful.

Those who dig pitfalls for others sometimes tumble into their own traps.

As Henry and Herbert left the spot where they had been conversing in fancied seclusion a head was thrust through a clump of bushes close at hand and a pair of sharp eyes looked after them.

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed the voice of Sam Jenkins. "Who'd have thought that of them? Of all the measly tricks I've ever heard of I think that is the worst. It is a lucky thing I overheard their plans. So Herbert means to destroy all of Don's inventive models, eh? Well, I guess not—not if this chicken knows it. I must try and find Don right away and let him know what's in the wind. Then he and I can go back to town and take the wind out of Herbert Shaw's sails in a way he won't like. The blamed fool is laying himself open to arrest by breaking into Mrs. Bruce's barn. But, then, he thinks no one will be the wiser. Expects the blame will be laid on tramps, I suppose. All right. If we don't give Herbert Shaw the surprise of his life I'll be surprised."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PROUDEST MOMENT OF HIS LIFE.

Sam started off in a hurry to find Don Bruce.

It was not an easy matter to locate a particular person in the crowd that was scattered throughout the grove.

Jenkins buttonholed every one he met with whom he was acquainted and asked if he or she had seen Don lately.

Some of them had and some had not.

Sam followed the different directions he got, but in no case did they lead up to the object of his search.

"Gee! This is tough," muttered Sam. "I can't spend all day looking for him. The damage will be done and Herbert will escape scot free, and he and that sneak, Henry

Chase, will have the laugh all to themselves. I've wasted fifteen minutes trying to find him. Herbert is probably on a car bound for town by this time. I can't lose any more time. I'll take the matter into my own hands and polish that young scalawag off myself. Gee! I won't do a thing to him if he's done any damage before I get there to head him off."

So Sam ran out of the grove by the front entrance, hailed a trolley car that was just passing, bound for Oakland, and jumped aboard.

Where was Don all this time while his friend had been vainly hunting for him?

He and Marian were having a quiet little stroll in the grove all by their two selves.

When Sam boarded the car they were standing on the shore of the lake.

"Isn't it a lovely day for a picnic?" exclaimed Marian, who was dressed in a fetching white dress, with a pink sash around her waist, and her golden curls hidden under a straw hat.

"Fine," replied Don, enthusiastically. "It's almost as lovely as yourself."

"Now, Don Bruce, no personalities, please," she answered, with a deep blush.

"I beg your pardon, but it slipped out," laughed her escort. "I never saw you look prettier, so I hope you'll excuse me saying so."

"I'll excuse you if you promise not to make any more such silly remarks."

"That wasn't a silly remark. It was the truth," protested Don.

"Now, Don," she expostulated, holding up one finger in a reproving way.

"Oh, come now, Marian, allow me to have the privilege of thinking that you are the prettiest as well as the nicest girl in the grove to-day."

"It is very nice of you to think so," she said, looking down at the water, "but you mustn't say all you think."

"I'll bet everybody who has seen you thinks the same. I know that my sister does, for she said so the moment she saw you come in at the gate."

"Your sister is a very nice girl, and I like her very much, indeed," said the banker's daughter, trying to change the subject.

"Oh, she's all right. I like Edith next to—that is, I like her next to mother. I suppose you wish you had a brother?"

"Yes; it would be nice to have a brother. That is, if he was like—some boys I know."

"Some boys?" repeated Don. "What boys are your particular favorites?"

"You mustn't ask me such embarrassing questions," she replied, with a blush.

"All right," said Don. "Don't mind what I say. Want to go out on the lake?"

"In a rowboat?"

"Sure; that is, if you aren't afraid that I'll spill you into the water."

"I'm not afraid of that," she replied smilingly. "I was wondering if we'll have time. You know we promised to be back to lunch at two, and it's after one now," looking at her little gold watch.

"Then suppose we postpone it until after lunch?"

"Very well."

They turned and walked slowly back into the grove toward the small pavilion that Banker White had engaged expressly for the entertainment of his family and one or two particular friends, which included Don.

They found a most appetizing spread awaiting them at the pavilion.

All of the party being present, Mr. White gave the signal to gather around the table and fall to.

At three o'clock lunch was over, and Mr. White suggested that all adjourn to the circle of seats around the band platform of the grove.

Here the Oakland Cornet Band had been engaged by the banker to give an open-air concert, chiefly for the benefit of the grown folks.

"How about that row on the lake?" whispered Don to Marian.

"We'll go by and by," she replied. "I want to hear the band first."

Of course, Marian's wishes were law with Don, and he accompanied her to the place where the band was already discoursing sweet music.

He did not know, however, that he was the victim of a harmless little conspiracy engineered by the banker and assisted by his daughter.

When they reached the opening where the stand was they found that a bench right in front of the music stand had been reserved for them.

Don was surprised at the number of persons present.

It seemed as if about everybody who had come to the picnic had gathered several layers deep, facing the platform.

The subdued air of expectation which rested on people's faces also made Don believe that there was something in the wind.

The band was playing a pot pourri of late airs when Banker White and his party took their seats.

As soon as the music ceased, Mr. Wagner, the superintendent of the Sunday-school, mounted the platform and made a dignified bow to the people present.

He began by saying that he was proud to see such a large gathering present at the annual outing.

He then congratulated the people on having such a splendid day for the picnic.

After making a few more remarks suitable to the occasion, he said that he would now introduce Mr. White, the well-known banker, who, he understood, had something to say to the assemblage.

Mr. White rose, mounted the steps to the platform, and was cheered.

This was to be expected, as he was one of the most popular men in Oakland.

He also began by remarking that he was glad to see so many happy faces around him.

Then he started right in to speak about the subject he had in mind.

He said the people of Oakland in general, as well as the members of the church, doubtless appreciated the honor of having in their midst one of the smartest as well as pluckiest boys in the country.

Here there was a general craning of necks to look at Don Bruce, who was much confused by being thus publicly eulogized in such a way by the banker of Oakland.

Mr. White then reviewed the events in which Don had figured with such credit to himself, and he spoke in a dramatic way about the terrible experience the young lad had undergone in the railroad cut the night he had been bound to the track by the four crooks, who meant by maiming him for life to wreak vengeance on him for his agency in depriving them of the plunder which had been buried in the cellar of the deserted farmhouse near the trolley road.

"After such a narrow escape," went on the banker, "few boys would have had the nerve to place themselves once more within the reach of such a gang of rascals, even to save the property of one with whom he was acquainted. Yet that is exactly what Don Bruce did. I will not go into the details of his plucky act in saving my house from being robbed, for you all have read the facts in the Times. I have brought the subject up because I wish to publicly acknowledge the indebtedness of myself and family to this young hero. As I am sure you all want to have a good look at the boy who is not only an honor to your church, but to the town as well, I shall request him to come forward and show himself."

That was the signal for Mr. Wagner to walk up to Don. "Come, Don," he said, with a smile. "Step on the platform. The people wish to see you."

Don, however, objected to this public inspection.

All the same, he was not permitted to escape the ordeal. As Mr. Wagner took him by the arm and led him unwillingly forward some boy in the crowd shouted:

"Three cheers for Don Bruce."

They were given, the ladies and girls clapping their hands.

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce Donald Bruce," said the banker, as soon as Don reached the top of the platform.

"Hurrah for Bruce!" cried another boy on the outskirts of the crowd.

Don bowed as gracefully as he could, considering his embarrassment.

Mr. White then made a sign to his daughter, and Marian stepped forward.

"Mr. Bruce."

Don turned, and there, to his surprise, was Miss White on the platform with him.

"Mr. Bruce," repeated Marian, who did not appear to

be at all discomposed by the part she had been called upon to act, "my father and mother have deputed me to present you with this little testimonial of their gratitude for your brave defense of our property early last Monday morning. I assure you that it affords me great pleasure to have the honor of publicly handing it to you, together with my own grateful appreciation of your valuable services in our behalf on that occasion."

She handed Don a small plush box, which he accepted with a flushed face.

While the audience was heartily applauding the presentation speech of Marian White, Don mechanically opened the box, and saw displayed on a bed of fluffy cotton an elegant pair of diamond cuff buttons, an enameled and diamond-encrusted watch-charm and a golden horseshoe stick-pin studded with diamonds.

Then several boys yelled:

"Speech! Speech!"

Don stared at the valuable gifts which had been presented to him, and then looked helplessly into the beautiful face of the young lady who had so honored him by publicly coming on the platform and giving them to him.

He was excusable if under the trying circumstances he was attacked by a species of stage-fright.

He realized that something was expected of him—a few words of thanks—but his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, as it were, and he was unable to utter a sound.

"Great Christopher!" he thought. "How am I going to get out of this?"

He began to be painfully conscious of the fact that he must be looking like a fool, or, at the best, exceedingly awkward.

When the applause ceased the cries for a speech were renewed with greater vigor.

He saw that he was in for it, and at last he made a desperate effort in his own behalf.

"Miss Marian White," he began, "I am very much obliged to you, and to your father and mother, for these handsome and valuable gifts. I accept them gratefully, and shall never look at them without recalling this occasion, which I may say is the proudest event of my life, as well as the exciting affair which gave rise to these tokens of appreciation on the part of yourself and your parents."

Here Don was interrupted by a burst of applause.

It afforded him a slight breathing spell and enabled him to fully recover his customary composure.

"In addition, I wish to thank you for the honor you have accorded me in coming upon this platform and presenting these gifts yourself. I assure you that I shall prize them all the more because of the fair hands through which they have passed to my own."

Don bowed as gallantly as he could to the fair girl, then he turned and bowed to Mr. White, after which he bowed to the audience, and, holding out his hand to Marian, gracefully led her down from the platform and back to her seat, amid cheers and clapping of hands.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

While the delightful event we have just recorded was in progress, other things connected with the hero of this story were happening in Oakland.

When Sam alighted from the car at the nearest point to the Bruce cottage he started for his friend's house at a brisk trot.

Herbert, who had preceded him in the car ahead, reached the cottage slightly in advance of Sam.

After reconnoitering the neighborhood with some caution, he boldly entered the yard and went to the barn.

Of course he found the door locked—it was secured by a staple and a padlock.

He expected this, and had provided himself with a stout piece of steel to use in breaking the hasp off.

He changed his mind, however, when he saw that one of the loft windows was open, and he looked around for something that would enable him to enter the barn through the window.

It was not long before he discovered a short ladder in the yard, and, placing it under the window, he mounted the rungs and disappeared inside just as Sam entered the yard.

Jenkins hastened toward the barn, and, seeing the staple undisturbed, came to the conclusion that Herbert had not arrived yet.

Accordingly, he decided to hide around the corner of the building.

No sooner had he turned the corner than to his surprise he saw the open loft window, with the ladder beneath it.

"Geewhilkens! The rascal has got here before me and is already in the loft. I haven't a moment to spare."

He immediately started up the ladder, and, looking in at the window, saw Herbert Shaw taking down the model of the rock-crusher from its resting-place on the shelf.

Sam crawled noiselessly in at the window and took shelter behind a box, where he could observe Herbert's movements and be within reach to foil his purpose at the critical moment, for Sam determined that, to make sure of getting back at Don's enemy, he must capture him in the very act of his vandalism.

Herbert placed the rock-crusher model on the bench and looked at it with some interest.

He turned the crank to see how it worked, and the effect seemed to please him.

He examined it all over, and finally he took a piece of paper and wrapped it up.

"Ho!" muttered Sam. "He calculates to take that away with him. He will, in a cow's ear!"

Herbert next took down the model of another machine.

He looked that over, too, but it did not interest him.

One after another he unloaded the shelf of its different devices, most of them very crude and useless models.

When he had satisfied his curiosity with reference to them all, he began his work of destruction by seizing a

hammer and demolishing a valueless contrivance that Don had, after much labor, put together a year since.

As he raised the hammer to smash another machine Sam sprang upon him and knocked him on his back with a well-directed blow behind the ear which half-stunned him.

Sam tore the hammer from his grasp and, seizing him by the arm, dragged him across the loft to the window.

Pushing him through feet first, he let him drop to the ground outside, where he collapsed.

Sam followed, closing the window after him, and reached the ground just as Herbert was trying to get on his feet.

Sam threw the ladder down and then marched up to the bewildered youth, who did not seem as yet to understand just what had happened to him.

"You're a nice chap, you are, Herbert Shaw!" he said sarcastically. "Do you know what I ought to do with you? I ought to hand you over to a policeman for breaking into Mrs. Bruce's barn."

"What—what's that?" gasped young Shaw.

"You heard what I said, didn't you?" replied Sam, fiercely.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. What do you mean by coming here from the picnic grounds, putting a ladder up against that window, entering the loft, and trying to destroy Don Bruce's models of inventions?"

"Who says I did?" blustered Herbert, with a white face.

"I say so. I caught you in the act."

"I wasn't doing anything. Just looking at Bruce's models. You hadn't any right to hit me."

"Oh, you weren't doing anything, eh? You weren't going to steal that rock-crusher model that you wrapped up in a newspaper? You didn't smash one of the models with a hammer? You're very innocent, you are. Suppose I have you arrested; what do you think the magistrate will say to you?"

"You wouldn't dare have me arrested," replied Herbert, in shaky tones.

"Well, I'm either going to have you arrested, or I'm going to lick you right here. You can take your choice."

"If you touch me I'll tell my father."

"I'll bet your father will say I did right when he hears what you have done."

"Don't hit me," almost whimpered the cowardly youth. "Henry Chase put me up to do the job. I'll give you five dollars if you let me go and don't say anything about the matter."

"You can't bribe me with five dollars, Herbert Shaw. I'll let you off on one condition."

"I'll agree to anything," replied Herbert, eagerly.

"All right. Come right over to my house."

"What for?"

"I want you to write out and sign a statement admitting what you have been caught at, and if you want to throw any

of the blame on your friend Henry Chase you can do it, for all I care."

"I don't want to do that," objected Herbert.

"Then take off your jacket and take a licking like a man."

"I can't fight," replied Herbert, backing away.

"You've got to, unless you'd rather be arrested."

"I'll write out the paper," agreed Shaw, in trembling accents.

"Come along, then, and do it."

Sam grabbed him by the arm and marched him down the street to his house, where he took Herbert up to his room and, placing pen, ink and paper before him, stood over him until he wrote a statement down from his dictation and signed it.

But Sam was not through with him yet.

He marched Herbert down to a notary's office and made him swear to the truth of the statement and acknowledge that the signature on the paper was his.

"Now you can go, Herbert Shaw," he said. "I'll keep my word about this paper. Nobody shall see it but Don Bruce. It won't be used against you so long as you behave yourself and don't try to cut up any more monkey-shines against Bruce. The moment we catch you at another mean trick we'll put it in the hands of the police and push you through."

Thus speaking, Sam turned on his heel and took the first car back to the picnic grove, while Herbert Shaw went home to ponder on the way of the transgressor, too much cowed to think of any scheme for trying to get square with Sam Jenkins.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EMPIRE ROCK-CRUSHER CO., INC.

It was after four when Sam re-entered the grove and went around hunting for Don.

He met one of the High School boys, who told him that Don was out rowing on the lake with Marian White.

Then it was that Sam learned of the presentation that had been made to his friend.

"It's nothing more than he deserves," said Jenkins. "I wouldn't go through what he did for a million dollars in cash. I mean his experience in the cut last Sunday night. He just escaped by the skin of his teeth, and that is too close a call for me, you bet your life."

Sam did not get a chance to tell Don about Herbert's attempt to destroy his models until the following morning.

Don could hardly believe the story.

The sworn statement signed by Herbert, however, which Sam showed him, was evidence enough to show that his friend told nothing but the exact truth.

"What a mean little villain he is," said Don, in a tone of disgust. "And he belongs to one of the best families in

Oakland. Why, he never considered me good enough to talk to. I'm glad you didn't have him arrested. His people would have suffered more from the disgrace of it than he."

"He told me that Henry Chase put him up to it, and I believe it, especially after what I overheard between the two at the grove. If I hadn't heard that conversation your models would all have been in the soup when you got back home."

"Well, Sam, I'm awfully obliged to you for what you did for me. I sha'n't forget it."

"Don't mention it. You'd do the same for me if it was necessary."

"Sure I would."

That evening Don visited the White residence and took tea there.

He for the first time told the banker about his different inventions.

Mr. White seemed to be particularly interested in the rock-crusher, and told Don that he would like to see his working model very much.

"If I really think it is practical I'll help you get it patented," he said.

Don brought the model over during the week, explained its utility and showed how it worked.

Two weeks later arrangements were under way for the taking out of a patent on the machine in Don's name.

Ten days afterward the trial of the three crooks came off. It was short and to the point.

They were convicted, and all received stiff sentences in the State prison.

During July and August Marian White and her mother went to the mountains, but Marian and Don kept in touch by letter.

Herbert Shaw also went away from town with his mother and sister during the heated term, and he was not greatly missed by anybody who knew him.

In the meantime Sam interested his father, who was a well-to-do carpenter and builder, in Don's rock-crusher, and Mr. Jenkins agreed to purchase an interest in the invention for Sam for one thousand dollars as soon as Don got his patent.

"So we're going to be partners, after all," said Sam, when he came over to his friend's house to announce his father's decision.

"Glad to hear it, Sam. I guess you and I will pull together all right."

"You can bet your life we will. When we finish school I suppose we'll set up an office here in town?"

"Well, we'll see about that when the time comes."

"Bruce & Jenkins will look all right on a sign," grinned Sam, who was tickled over the idea of becoming a partner in a real firm. "Proprietors and manufacturers of the Empire Rock Crusher, the only perfect machine of its kind on the market. How is that? Look well on our business cards, won't it?"

Don laughed and told Sam not to count his chickens before they were hatched.

"Oh, they'll be hatched, all right," replied Sam, nodding his head in an energetic way that was customary with him whenever he made an assertion.

Just before the patent was issued to Don on his Empire Rock Crusher a client of the firm of patent lawyers that were attending to the matter in the boy's interest, having examined the model and specifications of the machine, made Don an offer of five thousand dollars for the patent as soon as issued.

Don was not anxious to dispose of his invention, as it was the only available one he had on hand, but five thousand dollars looked like a lot of money.

It would also mean a disappointment to his friend Sam, for, the rock-crusher disposed of, there was no occasion for a partnership between them, for the present, at least.

Don called on Banker White, showed him the letter containing the offer in black and white, and asked him what he had better do.

"You are not very eager to sell your rights in this machine, eh?" asked Mr. White, with a smile.

"I would prefer to hold on, sir, for various reasons. Surely, if the patent is worth five thousand dollars in the eyes of a stranger, it ought to be worth more than that to me."

"Not necessarily so. It will take capital to build the machines and put them into operation. That is a serious disadvantage that you labor under."

"I have thought of that, sir."

"While you are trying to raise the necessary money some smart chap may make an improved machine that will outshine yours as much as yours does those already in operation. That is a risk you are taking if you hold on."

"Then you would advise me to sell my rights to this man?" said Don.

"I don't advise you accept his offer until you have submitted to him a counter-proposition."

"A counter-proposition, sir?"

"Yes. You had better empower me to act for you in this matter. I'll submit a proposition in your name to form a stock company, with a capital of, say, twenty-five thousand dollars. That is five hundred shares of a par value of fifty dollars each. In exchange for your patent rights you are to retain one hundred shares of the stock, and out of the funds received for the sale of the four hundred shares the sum of five thousand dollars in cash. If your friend Jenkins wishes to go into the company as a stockholder, also, his father will have the privilege of applying for as many shares at fifty dollars each as he cares to pay for."

Don liked this idea immensely, and said so; therefore Mr. White undertook to see if the stranger who had offered to buy the patent outright would consider the proposition of taking stock in the proposed company.

The gentleman in question, whose name was Mason, objected at first to the plan proposed by the banker, and raised his original offer another thousand dollars.

His purpose was to form a close corporation among a few of his friends, who stood ready to back him up with their

money, and thus control the machine for the benefit of himself and associates only.

Quite a bit of correspondence ensued between the banker, acting for Don, and Mr. Mason, and an arrangement was finally entered into by which Mr. Mason was to form and control the company, the capital of which was to consist of one thousand shares of stock at a par value of fifty dollars each.

It was agreed that Don was to receive one hundred shares of the stock and five thousand dollars in cash; that his friend Jenkins should have the privilege of purchasing fifty shares or less; that five hundred shares should remain in the treasury, and that the balance was to be apportioned among Mr. Mason and his friends at the face value.

It was further agreed that the board of directors should consist of five stockholders, of whom Don and Sam were to be two.

It was further understood that Mr. Mason was to be the president and general manager; that he should designate who should fill the offices of vice-president and treasurer, and that Sam Jenkins should be the secretary—the president, secretary and treasurer to receive stated salaries.

This arrangement was made in accordance with the desire of Mr. White that Don should enter the Oakland Bank and work his way up to a responsible position therein.

In the meantime the patent for the rock-crusher was duly issued to Don.

The Empire Rock-Crusher Co., Inc., was formed in January of the following year under the laws of New Jersey, with its main office located in Jersey City and its business office (practically the main office) located in a tall skyscraper in New York City.

The four hundred shares of stock were all sold and paid for, Sam Jenkins getting twenty shares through his father.

Don got a certificate for one hundred shares and the company's first check for five thousand dollars.

The duties of secretary devolved on the treasurer until Sam graduated in June, when he was expected to move to New York and take hold.

While Don was not prominently identified with the company, he was nevertheless liberally provided for, inasmuch as he held one-fifth of the stock issued, and had five thousand dollars cash to his credit in the Oakland Bank, on a time deposit, drawing three and a half per cent. interest.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Don and Sam duly graduated in June, and both were slated to begin life's serious duties on the first day of the succeeding September.

"We've got about nine weeks to have a good time in before we knuckle down to business," said Sam to Don, the

morning they took their diplomas to a picture store to have them framed. "How shall we put in the time?"

"I'm going with Mrs. White and Marian to the Catskills," replied Don. "Mr. White has a cottage up in the neighborhood of the Dunderburg Hotel. What's the matter with you going along?"

"How can I, when I'm not invited?"

"Don't you worry about that. I'll fix it so you can go."

"You seem to have a pretty good pull with the Whites," grinned Sam.

"Well, they certainly seem to think that they can't do too much for me," replied Don, laughingly.

"I suppose you mean to marry Marian some day, and eventually annex all the old gentleman's wealth?" chuckled Sam.

"Oh, I don't know," flushed Don. "It takes two to make a bargain, and no matter what my feelings are on the subject, the young lady might have different ones."

"Not much fear of that. You're the whole thing with her."

"How do you know?"

"I can only judge by what I see. For the past year nobody but you has had a ghost of a show with Marian White."

"Oh, we're good friends, all right," replied Don.

"I should say you were. When are you going to propose?"

"You get out. I'm not eighteen yet. There's plenty of time yet."

"That's right; but look out that she doesn't meet some dashing chap at these summer resorts that may put your nose out of joint. Girls aren't always to be depended on. They don't know their own mind half the time."

"You talk as if some girl had thrown you down."

"No; but I've seen other fellows thrown down when they thought they were the only thing in sight."

"I'm not afraid to take my chance with Marian. She's the best girl in the world."

"Of course she is," chuckled Sam. "Well, you can count me in on this summer racket if you can smooth the way for me."

"All right, Sam. I'll let you know in a day or two."

Don immediately spoke to Mr. and Mrs. White about having Sam Jenkins at their cottage in the Catskills.

They offered no objections to his society, and so Don notified his chum to prepare to accompany the party on the first of July.

"Did you hear the news?" asked Sam, when he joined the party at the station on the morning of their departure for the mountains.

"What news?" asked Don, looking at his chum.

"Bug Burley, the head crook of the bunch you helped to send up the river a year ago, has escaped from Trenton."

"Is that a fact?" asked Don.

"That's what the paper says this morning. You can read it for yourself as soon as we get aboard the car."

Don read the item later on, and found that Bug Burley

had indeed escaped from the Trenton Penitentiary, where he had been sent to serve a fifteen-year sentence.

The White cottage was situated in a romantic spot on the Dunderburg Mountain, within a short distance, but out of sight, of the Dunderburg Hotel, which was perched on the summit.

There were a dozen other cottages, owned or rented by wealthy people, in the immediate vicinity, and all facing up the serpentine road that wound down the mountain side to the station of the Dunderburg Mountain Railway.

July had passed away and the last week of August was drawing near.

Don, Sam and Marian White had been having a bang-up time in the mountains, for there were many young folks in the neighborhood with whom they associated.

One afternoon, after lunch, Don proposed that they take a stroll up to the Dunderburg Glen, one of the wildest and most romantic spots on the Dunderburg.

Marian and Sam were agreeable to this plan.

Just before they started out a neighbor came over to the White cottage and announced that the Raynor cottage, the furthest one from the hotel, had been burglarized the night before.

The thief had carried off not only all the available plunder, but a considerable quantity of food as well.

This was rather startling news, and Don warned Mrs. White to keep her eyes wide open while they were away, lest she be troubled by some undesirable visitor.

The boy, fearing that they might possibly run across the rascal somewhere in the mountain wilds, prudently took his revolver from his trunk and put it in his pocket.

"It will be handy to have in case of an emergency," he remarked to Sam.

"Yes; but I guess there isn't much likelihood that the fellow will show himself in the broad daylight, if he still is in this neighborhood, which is not likely, for it is probable he has made for the river with his plunder. The fact that he hooked a quantity of food shows that he intended to keep well in hiding."

The three young people started off on their jaunt and in the course of an hour were standing at the entrance to the glen.

There was a small, rude shanty not a great way from where they stood, and Sam proposed that they take a look at it.

Accordingly they started for it.

The door of the hut was closed, but, as there seemed to be no indications that it was inhabited, they did not hesitate to enter the place.

"Somebody has been here not very long ago," said Sam, pointing to some crumbs of food that were scattered on the top of an inverted box.

"I guess some of the hotel people were up here lately, and they may have brought some lunch with them," replied Don.

"This would be a nice, airy habitation to spend one's

honeymoon in," grinned Sam, with an intelligent wink at his chum.

"Then I suppose I may expect to hear of you coming here with your bride one of these days, Mr. Jenkins?" laughed Marian.

"Ho! I'm not going to get married," replied Sam.

"What, never? Have you decided to become an old bachelor?"

"I didn't mean that. I meant that I wasn't going to get married for a good while yet. I like to be my own boss, and a fellow can't always be that when he is hitched to some girl."

"The satisfaction of having a nice wife ought to be sufficient compensation for the loss of your freedom," laughed Marian.

"It's a good idea to be your own master as long as you can, at any rate," replied Sam, with his customary nod of the head.

"I wish I had a drink of water," said Marian, who had seated herself on the box, after Don had brushed the crumbs from it.

"Well, I'll take a look around and see if I can find a stream anywhere. I heard there was one up here. I've got a collapsible rubber cup in my pocket, which I carry for just such emergencies, and I'll fetch you back a drink if I can locate the water."

"Don't be long, Don," said the girl.

"Not if I can help it. You and Sam can have it out on the subject of matrimony while I'm away."

"We're through already," chuckled Sam.

"Then talk about something else," said Don, as he walked out of the hut.

After walking perhaps a quarter of a mile the boy came to a trickling mountain stream, and after taking a drink himself he filled the rubber cup and started back for the hut.

As he came in sight of it he thought he heard a scream in the distance.

"That sounded like a girl," he said to himself, stopping and listening.

The sound was not repeated, and he went on.

The door of the shanty, although wide open when he left, was now closed.

Don thought this was funny, for the weather was decidedly warm, even at that altitude, and the hut was close and not over-sweet.

He walked up to the door and banged it wide open.

The scene that met his view staggered him.

Sam was stretched out motionless on the floor, with the blood trickling from a cut somewhere on the head, while Marian lay insensible, supported by the arm of a hard-looking ruffian, who was taking the diamond earrings from her ears.

The fellow looked up with a wolfish snarl as Don threw open the door and his hand instantly sought his hip-pocket, where the butt of a revolver protruded.

Although the rascal was greatly changed for the worse,

Don at once recognized him as Bug Burley, the escaped convict.

The recognition was mutual, and with a howl of anger Burley yanked out his weapon.

Don on the spur of the moment threw the cupful of water at his head and drew his own revolver.

The cup struck the ruffian in the face, and the splashing water disconcerted him for a moment.

That probably saved Don's life.

Both revolvers cracked at the same moment.

Don felt the wind of the bullet on his cheek and quickly recoiled his weapon.

When the smoke blew away the boy saw that the game was in his own hands, for Burley lay gasping for breath on the floor, with a ball through his chest.

As Don grabbed Marian she uttered a fluttering sigh and opened her eyes.

"Oh, Don," she cried, throwing her arms around his neck, "save me!"

"Don't worry, you're safe enough," he replied reassuringly.

"Oh!" she exclaimed shudderingly, as she saw the gasping form of the ruffian almost at her feet, with the revolver on the floor. "What did you do to him, Don?"

"I shot him," replied the boy, coolly. "It was his life or mine, and luck ran my way."

"He isn't dead."

"No, but he looks hard hit. You can see by the blood on his shirt where the bullet struck him. How was Sam knocked out? Not shot, for I should have heard the report of the revolver."

"He was hit with a stick, I think."

"That club, I guess," said Don, as he raised Sam's head and looked at the wound near the top of his head. "I must get some water and bring him to."

"I'll go with you," said the girl. "I wouldn't remain here for anything."

Don learned that the rascal had appeared suddenly behind Sam and struck him down, when Marian screamed and fainted.

It was her cry that Don heard as he approached the shanty.

Sam was brought to without much trouble, and his wound proved to be of small consequence.

"I'll bet this is the chap that robbed the Raynor cottage last night," he said.

It proved so, for they found a bag full of the plunder stowed away in a cupboard in a corner.

They took charge of it between them and returned it to the owner.

The hotel detective and a posse went to the hut with Don and Sam and found Burley in pretty bad shape.

He was a tough rascal, however, and survived the wound, so that he was subsequently carried back to Trenton to complete his term of imprisonment.

On the first of September Don entered the Oakland Bank, while Sam began a new life in New York City as secretary to the Empire Rock-Crusher Co., Inc.

Years have passed since then, and to-day Don Bruce is the cashier of the bank, and also a stockholder in same.

He has been married to Marian White just six months, and he expects at the next meeting of the directors to be elected vice-president of the bank.

There is little doubt that when Mr. White retires Don will become president, for he has the White influence at his back, and Mr. White practically owns the bank.

As for Sam Jenkins, he is still secretary of the rock-crusher company, and is now the owner of one hundred shares of its stock.

Don earns a handsome annuity from his interest in the company, for when the treasury stock was sold to enlarge the company's business he purchased a second one hundred shares at a premium of ten dollars per share.

Don has practically fought his way to success, for the goal of his ambition is now in sight, and the same may be attained by every energetic boy of Don's caliber who is BOUND TO RISE.

THE END.

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